







































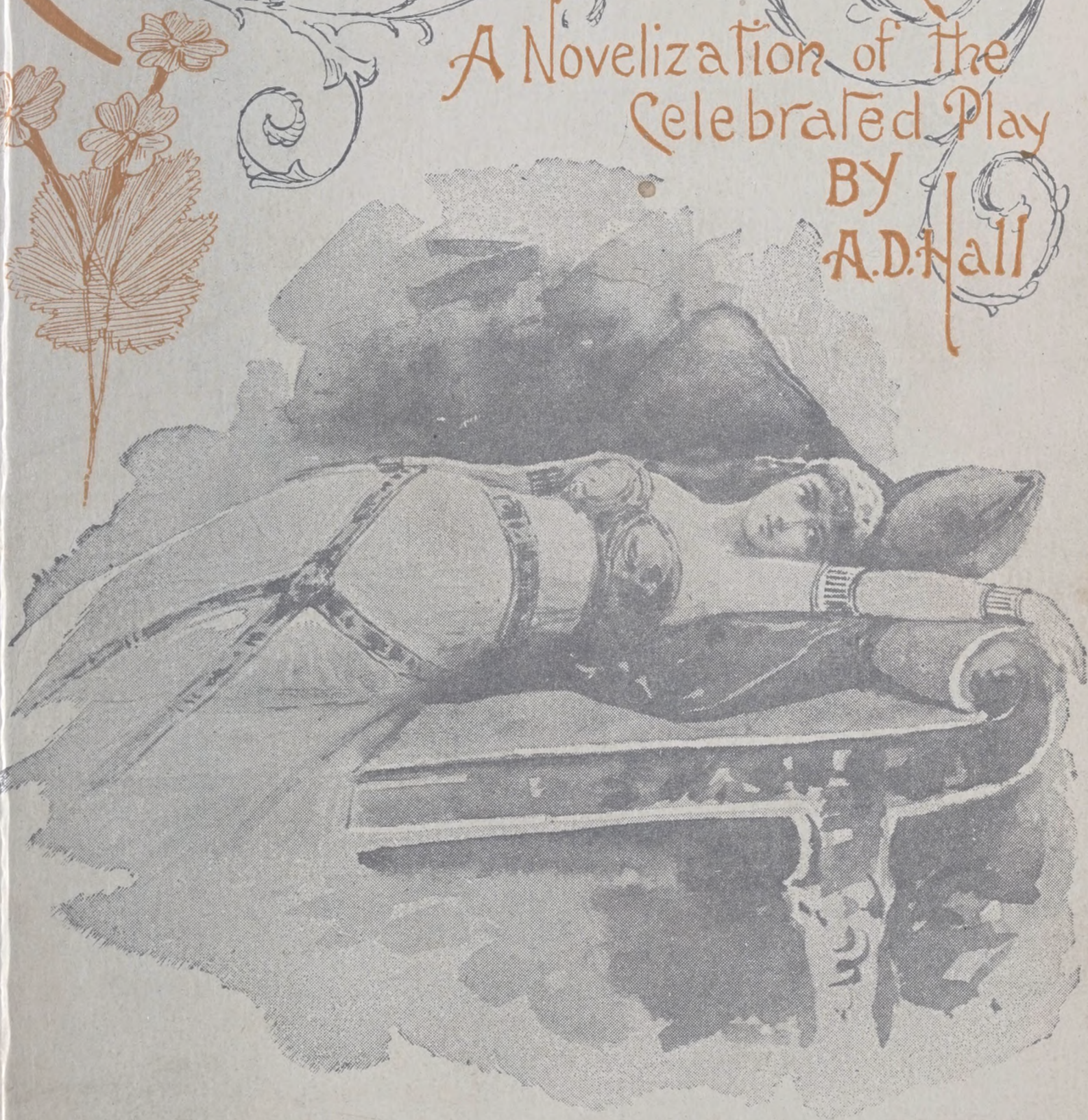


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BY  
A.D. Hall



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## SARDOU'S CLEOPATRA.

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A Novelization of the Celebrated Play

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40  
BY A. D. HALL.

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NEW YORK:  
STREET & SMITH, Publishers.  
31 Rose Street.



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“ Her beauty might outface the jealous hours,  
Turn shame to love, and pain to tender sleep,  
And the strong nerve of hate to sloth and tears;  
Make spring rebellious in the sides of frost,  
Thrust out lank winter with hot August growths,  
Compel sweet blood into the husks of death,  
And from strange beasts enforce harsh courtesy.”

T. HAYMAN—1655.



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# SARDOU'S CLEOPATRA.

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## CHAPTER I.

### AT THE MERCY OF THE CONQUEROR.

It was close upon mid-day. The sun, nearly at its height, poured down its rays upon the little city of Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia, flooding with light the broad streets, courts, and quays, and gleaming upon the polished marble of the temples and buildings. The Cydnus, like a ribbon of molten silver, rippled and sparkled between its banks, lined with cypresses, pomegranate trees, and laurel roses. Beyond rose the wooded summits of Mount Taurus, outlined against the deep blue of the cloudless sky.

Exquisite as the day was, it brought no cheer to the heavy hearts of the inhabitants of Tarsus.



They had committed that unpardonable sin—the espousal of a lost cause, and the day of reckoning had come.

The civil war which followed the death of Cæsar is ended. Vanquished in the battle of Philippi, where Roman liberty expired, Brutus and Cassius are no more. The triumviri, Mark Antony, Octavius Cæsar and Æmilius Lepidus, share between them the empire of the world. Now has come the hour of reprisals, vengeance and proscription. Woe to the kings and provinces who, during the two years of civil war, have furnished aid to or shown sympathy with the republicans! Savage Mark Antony is devastating Asia Minor, extorting large sums from the cities, overwhelming the people with taxes and inflicting upon the rebels pitiless punishments. To-day has come the turn of Tarsus, who has been chief among the offenders, and now, at the mercy of Antony, she must pay for her culpable past with the heads and gold of her citizens. To-day, at noon, the victorious general is to hold his court upon the banks of the Cydnus. The rulers who have offended him have been summoned hither; and, first of all, the young Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra, the daughter of Ptolemy Auletes, who is accused of furnish-



ing soldiers, vessels and subsidies to the murderers of Cæsar—that very Cæsar whose mistress she has been—has been ordered to appear before the tribunal of the all-powerful triumvir.

The great square close to the Cydnus is thronged with an anxious, expectant crowd; a crowd that is full of suppressed excitement and yet strangely silent, intimidated by the soldiers of the Roman legions, who are omnipresent. Many an anxious glance is cast upon the gleaming waters of the river, straining to catch a glimpse of some sail rounding the promontory where the stream makes an abrupt turn to the south. It is close upon the appointed time, and yet no sign of the great queen. Will Cleopatra disobey the mandate of Rome and refuse to come? The gods forbid! In her alone rests their only hope.

Over the marble portico of the market-house has been stretched an awning of white and purple, the supports adorned with banners, shields, and lances, and everywhere the terror-inspiring letters, S. P. Q. R. A scarlet cloth has been stretched down the steps, at the top of which is a gilded chair, surmounted by the golden eagles of Rome. On each side, leaving a passage clear, is stationed a long line of soldiers,



Not far from the portico, a little isolated from the crowd, stood two men engaged in earnest conversation. The one was a man of about sixty, wearing a mantle of plain brown cloth over a battered and dented armor. His face, with its grizzled beard and shaggy eyebrows, in spite of the numerous scars that told of many a hard-fought contest, bore the impress of sturdy honesty and rugged manliness. His companion was much younger, not more than thirty, with the dark eyes and tawny complexion of the people of a sunny clime, and dressed with somewhat of foppish elegance in a tunic of embroidered linen, over which fell a long cloak of scarlet cloth with fringe of gold. He was an Egyptian, Diomedes by name, who had been sent as an ambassador to announce the coming of his royal mistress.

"It will go ill with Egypt," said the soldier, with an ominous shake of the head, "if the queen fails to appear. Antony is in no mood for trifling."

"Have no fear, Ventidius. She will be here, though possibly it were better for your master did she refuse."

"I do not understand."

The Egyptian smiled slyly.



"You will later. But tell me, why has she been summoned here?"

"She is accused of making war upon us and furnishing gold and soldiers to the assassins of Cæsar."

"Impossible!" replied Diomedes, with an incredulous movement of his straight, black eyebrows.

"That is the common rumor," said Ventidius, sturdily. "Our enemies were conquered and their death was certain. Philippi was for Antony another Pharsala. But before his defeat, Cleopatra adroitly conveyed aid to Brutus. Antony believes this, at least, and he has resolved to force her to publicly answer the charge."

"Does he pretend to be seriously angry with her?"

"Certainly, and she must explain her conduct."

Diomedes was silent for a moment, and his crafty black eyes roved over the seething multitude beneath.

"Ventidius," he said, at last, "you were in Egypt with Cæsar, were you not?"

"Yes. Why ask that?"

"You have seen Cleopatra?"

"Often."



"And yet you do not foresee the end of this trial?"

Ventidius stared at the Egyptian for a moment, and then a light broke over his rugged face. Striking his hands together with a loud noise, he exclaimed:

"By Hercules, I see your drift!"

Diomedes smiled.

"The triumvir will be convinced that he has accused the queen unjustly," he said, calmly.

"Fool that I was," exclaimed the old soldier, "not to have foreseen this, and endeavored to calm the general. With her boundless ambition and sensuous nature, she covets Antony and the Roman Empire. She would like to sway Rome and the triumvir. Her only ambition is to rule one day at the Capitol. I remember! I remember! Have I not already seen Cæsar a tool to all her plans, and obey her voice like one of her own subjects? She it was whom imperial Cæsar loved so much that Rome had pity on him, revolted, proscribed Cleopatra, and Cæsar left her. But for a long time, in spite of all, he remained faithful to her. Antony will have a worse fate than that of Cæsar, his model. Where Cæsar tottered, Antony will fall."



"I think as you," responded Diomedes. "Moreover, when Cæsar loved her she was very young, and she had the beauty of an ignorant child, who smiles for the sake of smiling and fascinates at hazard. Now, all is united in her: nature and art, grace and wit, and even science combine to give her supreme beauty. It is vain to seek to resist her marvellous attractions. At sight of her, one forgets in an instant all the evil that is said of her, and an invisible power chains you at her feet."

Diomedes ceased, but Ventidius made no reply; His thoughts were busy, and a great fear rested upon him. The battle-scarred veteran adored the general who had led his legions so often to victory, and his heart grew cold at the thought of this new peril which threatened his master and Rome. He remembered only too well the strange charm of Egypt's queen, and he knew thoroughly Antony's pleasure-loving nature. He was certain that he did not overestimate the danger. But how to save Antony? For Antony's safety meant the safety of Rome. The destiny of the empire, trembling in the balance, depended upon a single man. Antony was Rome's only hope. He alone could restrain the soaring ambition of Octavius.



Lepidus was only a puppet, a plaything. In the triumvirate he was simply a name, he counted for nothing. Without Antony, Octavius would be dangerous; to have the power shared by them maintained the equilibrium. If Antony were to fall a victim to the wiles of the royal siren, two dangers would threaten Rome: Either the queen would bend Antony to her will, in which case the Orient would command the Occident, or the warrior would be lulled to sleep in the soft embraces of love, and the Senate would fall into the power of Octavius. Rome would be either at the mercy of Cleopatra or at the mercy of Cæsar.

Ventidius turned again to the Egyptian ambassador. Diomedes had arrived two days before at Tarsus and had been confided to the care of the honest old Roman. The latter, with all his blunt frankness, was a keen judge of men, and he soon saw that Cleopatra's messenger was not too loyal to his queen, and, for some reason or other, would be glad to ingratiate himself with the Romans.

"May it not be impossible for the queen to come, as she has promised?" he asked. "Did you not tell me that her people were conspiring against her, and were discontented with her rule? May she not be forced to remain?"



"No," replied the Egyptian, "there are some malcontents who whisper revolt. But my countrymen are a docile race. Her reign is a gentle one, and they love her in spite of all. The greatest of crimes do not revolt them. If their gods are respected, that is all that they ask; they adore evil, when their gods command it. You can decimate them, load them with taxes, without rousing them to action. But if you kill in the sacred forest an ostrich or an ibis, war is declared. Gallus met his doom because a Roman chanced to kill a cat that crossed his path. The people, usually so tranquil, were driven to fury. Gallus took refuge in the port, and two thousand Romans perished—for a cat. No, the queen respects both gods and priests, who govern the people and are its masters. As a queen, she does her duty, and her scepter is held with a firm, sure hand."

As the Egyptian finished speaking, Ventidius cast upon him a look of mingled surprise and suspicion.

"You utter strange words," he said sharply, "for one who is an Egyptian himself."

Diomedes flushed darkly.

"Pardon me," he began; "I——"

But he was interrupted by a blare of trumpets.



The great triumvir was approaching. There were a stir and movement throughout the surging crowd, and the soldiers were obliged to use force to keep the people back. In another moment Antony, surrounded by his lieutenants, issued from the market-house and appeared upon the platform of the portico.

At the same moment, from a house at the opposite side of the square, appeared a dozen or so men, chained two and two together, and guarded by Roman soldiers. These were prominent citizens of Tarsus, who had been leaders in the recent rebellion.

As Mark Antony stood gazing down upon the people he had come to punish, he made a very imposing figure and looked every inch the soldier he was. He was in the full dress of a Roman imperator; a cuirass of closely fitting white leather, held in place by chains of gold, a toga and mantle of the purple of Tyre, and upon his feet white sandals. His head, with its mass of closely curling chestnut locks, was uncovered. There was a deep frown upon his brow, and his blue eyes flashed ominously.

The trumpets ceased. The prisoners were now at the foot of the scarlet covered steps.



Antony looked down upon them, and his face grew darker still.

“You, notables of Tarsus, are accused of giving aid and encouragement to the miserable assassins of noble Cæsar. Have you aught to say in your defense?”

For an instant there was silence, and then one of the prisoners, an old man with long white hair, said, in a trembling voice:

“Naught, my good lord, save to crave your clemency.”

“Clemency! Were those murderers clement? But there is one I do not see among you—she who was the instigator of it all! So, it seems that she has refused to obey our commands. The hour has come, and the proud wanton is not here! I wait no longer!”

Then, raising his hand with a gesture of command, he exclaimed, in a voice of thunder:

“Away with these men! Deliver them to the executioner!”

But the words had scarcely died upon his lips when over the terror-stricken multitude stole softly the strains of enchanting music, and in another moment, around the promontory, upon the



blue waters of the Cydnus appeared the shimmer of rose-colored sails.

A mighty shout went up from a thousand throats.

“Cleopatra! Cleopatra! She is here! She is here!”



## CHAPTER II.

## THE VICTOR VANQUISHED.

A look of triumph flashed across the handsome face of the triumvir. So ! this haughty queen had been forced to obey his commands. With a gesture, he stopped the soldiers who were about to lead away the prisoners.

Nearer and nearer, propelled by fifty oarsmen, swept the barge, until it reached the flight of marble steps that led down to the water's edge. A magnificent sight it was ! The stern of the superb galley was of beaten gold, the sails of the palest rose color, and all the cordage of twisted silk ; garlands of flowers hung from mast to mast, and were strewn over the decks which were covered with rare and costly cloths. Fifty Nubian slaves, with backs like gleaming jet, kept time with their silvered oars to the soft music of harps and flutes. Glistening censers sent forth their clouds of perfumed incense. Beautiful women,



robed as nereids and sirens, leaned against the masts or hung over the sides of the barge, casting flowers in the gleaming waters, while little naked boys, in the guise of cupids, fanned them with their painted wings. And in the center, beneath a canopy resplendent with embroideries of gold and silver, upon pale blue cushions bestrewn with lilies, reclined the Diamond of the East, the fairest woman beneath the skies. She was clad in a loosely flowing robe of shimmering gold colored gauze, through which gleamed the rosy radiance of her limbs. About her waist was a sash, embroidered with emeralds, rubies, amethysts and topazes. Magnificent jewels blazed upon her arms and bosom, and on her head was a coronet formed of diamond stars; golden sandals confined her little white feet; over all was thrown a vail embroidered with odd designs in gold and silver, and through its meshes, floated, like a star through the mist, her marvelous beauty.

As the barge stopped, Cleopatra, with slow, languid, grace, arose from her reclining posture, and like a new Venus Anadyomene issuing from the waves, she disembarked. Supported by two of her women, one of whom was her favorite



maid, Charmian, she moved, in an atmosphere of perfumes and harmony, across the marble-paved square, to the foot of the steps at the top of which stood her judge, the triumphant general who had ordered her into his presence.

With arms crossed over her breast, and holding in this way her glistening veil before her face, she bent in low reverence before him, while all the great crowd stood silent and motionless, breathlessly awaiting the result of this interview, which was of such vast consequence to them all.

The brow of the Roman general grew stern.

"So," he said, in a cold, measured voice, "Cleopatra has deigned at last to come and answer for her treachery. It was time!"

The queen raised her head, and, made an almost imperceptible gesture to Charmian, who lifted the veil that covered her mistress. Slowly it slipped back from her head and glided to the ground, lying in a fleecy, shimmering mass about her feet; and Antony, for the first time, looked upon that perfect face, that was to haunt him, henceforth, forever.

Egypt's queen was in the full prime of her glorious beauty. Her figure was superb, stately and graceful, with the exquisite rounded outlines



of one of the Graces of Apelles. Her heavy blue-black hair grew low over the perfect forehead; her nose was as straight and clear cut as that of a cameo, with rose-tinted nostrils, sensitive and palpitating at each emotion like those of an amorous tigress; a delicate flush, like the tint of a rose-leaf, tinged the creamy pallor of her cheeks; her mouth was small, with the upper lip disdainfully arched, but the unbridled passion of her nature blazed in the scarlet, dewy luster of the lower one; a rounded chin, full of force and mastery, terminated worthily her charming profile. But the dominating, resplendent glory of her whole face were her eyes, with the almost straight line of the brows and the long, curling black lashes. Dark and velvety, with tawny reflections, there was in them an indescribable commingling of sensuous languor and passionate fire.

Antony bent forward and he involuntarily caught his breath, as one does when suddenly brought into the presence of some masterpiece of surpassing beauty.

With a smile, half soft, half scornful, she raised her lovely eyes to his face; and then on his greedy ears fell the low, musical tones of the enchantress who was destined to subjugate him:



"How shall I plead my cause, when you, my judge, already have condemned me?"

It was unaccountable that his heart should have bounded so at her voice. He passed his hand over his eyes as one dazzled at the rays of the sun god; and it was with a softness of tone and manner which belied the words themselves, that he replied:

"You have instigated the inhabitants of this city of Tarsus to rebellion; you have been in league with the conspirators and aided them by all the means in your power."

"If it pleases my lord to believe this and ruin me, then I'll be guilty."

"Guilty! Ah! would that it were otherwise!"

Her lips parted, showing two rows of gleaming pearls, as she flashed upon him an intoxicating smile; with sinuous, panther-like grace, she moved a step or two nearer.

"I thank my lord," she said, in the same mellifluous tones, "and since my innocence will not offend, I will not blush to own it."

Her eyes were still fixed upon his face, and as she stood there in an attitude of supreme grace, she looked, in her gleaming draperies, like some beautiful golden bird who watches nonchalantly



her prey, knowing that it will soon be in her power.

Antony flushed scarlet, and the veins stood out like cords upon his forehead. He was rapidly becoming drunk with the sight of her incomparable loveliness.

But there was one who stood not far from him who was not in the least blinded by the fascinations of the wily queen. The heart of honest old Ventidius was sore within him as he recognized that his worst forebodings would rapidly become reality.

"Blush!" he thought angrily to himself, as he caught the queen's last words. "I believe she'd blush at nothing."

"Speak, oh queen," said the triumvir, in a voice which sounded muffled. "Speak, I listen."

"My lord," said Cleopatra, "I have been falsely accused. True, I did send gold and arms, but not to the conspirators. They were sent to the avengers of Cæsar. By either treachery or accident, my projects miscarried."

"Then, by Hercules—" began Antony.

But she raised her hand to implore silence.

"Not yet, my lord! I will be absolutely frank, and so I have a confession still to make. It is



reported that I hate Rome. No! I do not hate Rome nor—nor Antony. What I hate is Octavius!" Oh! matchless siren! How well she knew the bitter feelings existing between the two triumviri, who were men of exactly opposite characters except in the one quality common to both—ambition. "And now, my lord, speak, for I end here. Pronounce my sentence."

Sentence. Ah! the places are reversed; the criminal is saved, the judge condemned.

Slowly, as if impelled by some invincible power that drew him as a magnet in spite of himself, he descended the steps and stood at her side.

"I believe you," he said, in low, thrilling tones; "forgive my base suspicions."

She looked up at him, with a light, joyous laugh, musical as rippling waters.

"And these poor people of Tarsus?" she asked, with a wave of her white arm which was more powerful to conquer nations, than the iron muscles of the warrior.

Trembling, wholly vanquished, he took her hand in his; she did not withdraw it. Then, he led her up the steps, and standing by her side, before the chair of judgment, he cried out to the expectant people:



"The great queen has won your pardon. Tarsus is forgiven. Rome demands neither lives nor tribute."

For an instant, there was silence; and then a mighty shout went up which rent the heavens, and then another and another. The people, thus suddenly freed from the threatened danger, were frantic with delight. The prisoners prostrated themselves in gratitude at the foot of the steps.

Cleopatra gazed at the scene with a radiant look of conscious power and gratified triumph. She had won!

Amidst all the enthusiasm, Ventidius stood apart, with folded arms and gloomy brow. He glanced at the galley, lying idly on the Cydnus, with its wealth of gorgeous decorations and crowded with fantastically arrayed figures; and then to the portico of the market-house. The queen's women were reclining upon the steps in attitudes of picturesque abandon. Cleopatra herself was seated in the chair with the gilded Roman eagles, her delicate draperies half concealing, half revealing the ravishing lines of her faultless figure. Antony stood beside her, a look of passionate admiration on his handsome, manly face.



As he turned away his eyes from this picture which was so painful to him, Ventidius heard a low voice murmur in his ear :

"Well, did I not prophecy aright?"

He turned suddenly and faced the Egyptian ambassador, Diomedes.

"Yes," he muttered, angrily, "bird of ill omen that you are. He is lost, and we are lost with him. Oh! woman! all the gods have not such power of doing good as you of doing evil."

"Your master wants you," said Diomedes.

The old warrior faced quickly about and saw Antony motioning him to approach. Slowly and reluctantly he advanced to the portico.

"Ventidius," said Antony, "tell these good people to disperse."

Ventidius bowed, and, striding forward to the edge of the platform, he raised his hand with a gesture of command.

By degrees, the cheers died away.

"It is the triumvir's wish," he cried, in a stentorian voice, "that you retire to your homes and places of business. The trial is ended."

Gradually, the people obeyed, and soon, save for the soldiers, the broad square was deserted.

Ventidius joined the Roman officers who had



retired to the back of the platform, and Antony and Cleopatra were left virtually alone.

Strains of music from the musicians on the barge stirred gently the soft air.

He bent over until his cheeks almost brushed her fragrant hair.

"Royal Egypt," he murmured, in a voice that he vainly endeavored to steady, "are you satisfied?"

Languorously she threw back her head, slowly the heavy fringed lids were raised, and the midnight eyes plunged into his. Involuntarily he caught his breath, and like the helpless bird beneath the charm of the serpent, he was conscious of nothing save the fascination of her gaze.

"Satisfied!" she repeated, in tones more melodious than those of the lutes. "Noble Antony, it is for you to answer that. You sent for me, and I have come. Are *you* satisfied?"

"I sent for Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, and Venus, Queen of Beauty, has come."

She removed her eyes from his face, and her color deepened just a little.

"Ah!" she murmured, as if half to herself,



"would indeed I were Venus, then could I conquer this Mars."

Mad with love, drunk with passion, forgetful of all else on earth save this one woman, he sank on one knee at her side.

"Behold him at your feet! Cleopatra, queen, goddess, I love you!"

There was a moment of silence. Both hearts beat fast, his with ardent longing, hers with exultant triumph. Then she said, dreamily:

"Love! Ah! what is man's love? A passing fancy, the gratification of a moment. Such is not the love I demand! I would wish the absolute surrender of self, entire, utter devotion. The man whose love I accept must be ready to give up all, to welcome disgrace even and count it a priceless boon if it were the result of his winning me. He must have no ambition save to be near me, no glance that was not for me, no thought that was not mine. The rest of the world must not exist for him. Such a man, ah, such a man I could love."

She ceased. With glowing cheeks and eyes ablaze, Antony cried, impetuously:

"I am that man! I am ready to sacrifice all,



friends, wife, country, an empire, everything for a single kiss !”

As she heard these impassioned words, the queen's heart stirred for a moment with a something that was not wholly satisfied vanity. Bending toward him with a gesture that was almost a caress, she laid her white hand on his arm, and he felt the blood mount to his brain at that thrilling touch.

“The waters of the Cydnus are cold,” she said, in a half whisper, “while the warm rays of the sun kiss the banks of the Nile.”

The answer came, without a moment's hesitation.

“Lead on ! Where you go, I follow.”

As the light of dawn quivering upon the hill-tops wakes to life the fairness of nature, the queen's smile brightened her face into unspeakable loveliness.

She arose, and holding out her hand, said, in her crystalline voice:

“Come, then !”

He sprang to his feet, and, trembling in every limb, took her hand in his.

“Oh ! Star of the Orient, Queen of Love, take



me where you will. My life commences from to-day."

Hand in hand, they proceeded across the square, between the lines of wondering soldiers, to where the royal barge was waiting to receive them, and bear them away to the land of the rising sun.

Beneath the witchery of the siren, the judge's anger had melted like snow beneath a July sun. The great general, whom no legions of armed men could move a hair's breadth, had capitulated without resistance to a woman's smile. Bound in chains softer than velvet, stronger than steel, the mighty triumvir was reduced to slavery.

Vae victis!



## CHAPTER III.

## THE GREEK SLAVE.

It was the hour just before dawn; the roofs of Memphis had not yet caught the first flash of the sunlight, and the inhabitants were still fast bound in the embrace of the sleepy god, when a slender, girlish figure, so closely wrapped in the voluminous folds of her dark-colored peplum that even her face was concealed, emerged from a dark, narrow street into the square before the most magnificent temple of this city of magnificent temples, the Iseum, or Temple of Isis, built four centuries before by Amasis the Second.

The girl gave a quick glance about her, and then, hurriedly crossing the square, she proceeded round the side of the temple until she came to a small wooden door, set in heavy blocks of Syenitic granite. Upon this door she struck three distinct blows, followed after an interval of a few seconds by three more. Then, placing her ear



close to the wooden partition, she listened intently. Shortly she heard the sound of footsteps within, and a deep voice asked :

“Who is there ?”

“It is I, uncle—Iras. Open ! Open, quickly !”

There was the sound of the withdrawal of bolts and the rattle of chains ; the door swung open, and on the threshold appeared the tall figure of an old man. The lamp which he held aloft in his hand lighted up a face strong in intellect. His hair was white, and a long white beard fell almost to his waist. He was dressed in the snowy garments of a priest of Isis.

“What, Iras !” he exclaimed. “You here, at this hour ? What has happened ?”

“Let me in at once, uncle,” was the hurried reply. “I have much to say to you.”

He gave her a keen glance, and then, without a word, turned and led the way through a long, low corridor to a small, meagerly furnished apartment. Setting down the lamp, he motioned his visitor to be seated.

The girl threw back her peplum, revealing a delicate face, with great blue eyes, and crowned by masses of golden hair.

“Oh, uncle !” she exclaimed, nervously clasping



and unclasping her small hands, hardly larger than a child's, "is it yet time?"

"Time, Iras?" said the old man. "I do not understand you. Compose yourself, my child, compose yourself."

"He has not yet come?"

"He? Who?"

"Pharon."

"Pharon? Oh! the slave who is to die at day-break."

"Yes. And, oh, it is terrible—terrible! I could not sleep. And then I thought of you. Uncle, you alone can save him, if you will. He is so young to die."

"Save him, Iras. That is impossible. The great queen has commanded his death, and it is for me to see that her orders are carried out. I know nothing of him or of his offense."

"You know nothing!" she exclaimed in surprise.

"Nothing!"

"Let me tell you! Perhaps, then, you will have pity."

He motioned to her to proceed, and, in broken accents, Iras hurriedly told her tale.

Two weeks before, when Cleopatra, with her



maids, Charmian and Iras, was returning in the royal cangia from the festival of Hermonthis, a man, rising from the rushes of the Nile, cast into the boat, at the feet of the royal occupant, masses of flowers, blue and white lilies. Then, plunging into the water, followed, swimming in the wake of the vessel. Cleopatra raised the flowers, and said, with a smile: "It is the Nile, the god of waters." But Charmian was alarmed, and, fearing the man had some evil designs, prevailed upon her mistress to give orders to have the presumptuous swimmer arrested as soon as they should land. The command was carried out, and the young man was brought into the presence of the queen by Kephren, the captain of the royal guard.

"Are you some assassin sent by Rome," demanded the queen, severely, "that you have thus persistently followed us?"

The young man sank on his knees, as if before an altar of the gods, and stretched out his hands in supplication:

"May Zeus punish me as I deserve," he exclaimed, passionately, "if I have ever nourished any evil design toward you, Oh, queen!"

Sincerity and truth were depicted upon his



countenance; Cleopatra abandoned at once the idea that had been suggested by Charmian; and, fixing upon him a less severe look, she asked:

"You swear by strange gods. You are not an Egyptian."

"My name is Pharon. I am a Greek, and a slave, one of the boatmen of the port."

"But why did you so persistently follow the cangia?"

The Greek turned pale as death. He raised his eyes, and fixed them full upon the queen's face.

"I love you!" he answered, in low, thrilling tones.

Very handsome he was, as he knelt there; and so thought the queen, with her keen sense of beauty. She leaned toward him, and seizing his arm, with a sudden movement, she cried:

"So, you have raised your eyes to a queen! You have no mediocre ambition. You expected doubtless to have your love returned. Well, why not?"

"Queen," responded Pharon, with the deepest melancholy, "I implore you, do not jest. I am mad, I know, and after the declaration I have



made I deserve death. Send me forth to my fate."

"No, it is my caprice to be clement to-day; I give you your life."

"What shall I do with my life? I love you."

"Well, then," responded Cleopatra in a strange tone, "you shall be satisfied—you shall die. You have been pleased to indulge in a strange, extravagant dream; you imagined that you were Cæsar, and you loved the queen. What you thought impossible of accomplishment, I will make possible. It pleases me for once to realize a mad desire. I will take you from nothingness, make you the equal of a god, and then plunge you into nothingness again. But do not call me cruel, and implore my pity, when the price for a few hours of happiness has to be paid. You say that you love me. I accept your love. But—in ten days you die. Rise, and give me your hand!"

The ten days had expired, and this morning at daybreak, within the Temple of Isis, Pharon, the Greek, was to fulfill his part of the bargain and render up his life.

As Iras finished the recital of this strange story her uncle, Serapion, grand priest of Isis and royal astronomer, slowly stroked his long, white beard.



"Ah!" he thought to himself, "she is a queen always, but also always a woman. Through all her weakness, one sees her royalty. She proceeds calmly on her way, defiant of opinion, deserving perhaps only hatred, but inspiring only love."

"Uncle," murmured Iras, covering her face with her hands, "to-day he is to die."

"Why not?" responded the old man. "He accepted the bargain. A queen has loved him, and the slave must die."

Iras raised her head.

"Slave!" she repeated. "Ah! you should see him. No! the queen was right when she called him the god of the Nile. In my country the women are often loved by the god of the Scamander. Woe to her who rests too long upon the river's perfumed shores! He seizes her by her floating locks and bears her away to the deep grottoes beneath the waves. Her friends mourn and seek for her in vain. The river god loves her so much that he loves her forever."

"Child!" said Serapion, smiling indulgently. "These are but old wives' tales. The old Nile has no such delightful caprices. I don't know why I listen to such folly."

"But if he were a king," persisted the young



girl, "who, the better to succeed, employed a stratagem?"

"Kings are not so easily condemned to death."

A look of terror crept into the girl's blue eyes, and she sprang hurriedly to her feet.

"Condemned to death!" she echoed. "True! and I stay chattering here. Uncle! the queen is cruel! Oh, I am not a queen! Slave though he be, he is a Greek—he is of my country."

"It is not for you, Iras, nor for me to judge the queen," replied the priest, gravely. "This man is condemned; what matters to us his crime? What matters to us whether he lives or dies?"

"To you nothing, perhaps. To me everything."

"Iras!"

"Yes," she continued, impetuously, "everything. I love him. I know that with your knowledge you can save him. I swear to you, if you refuse, not one life will be sacrificed, but two. For I will not survive him."

The old man caught her by the wrist.

"Girl!" he exclaimed, "you are mad!"

"Perhaps! But I will do what I say."

The old priest was greatly agitated. He saw that she was in earnest. If there was anything



in the world that he cared for, it was this child of his dead sister—that sister who had been young enough to be his daughter, who twenty years before had been wooed and won by a young Hellene, and who had sailed away from her native land, never to return. Both husband and wife were dead, leaving one daughter, Iras, whom Serapion had brought from Greece three years before. The queen had taken a fancy to the golden-haired, blue-eyed girl and had taken her into her own household, where she had become a great favorite with her royal mistress.

Iras saw that her uncle was troubled, and she proceeded eagerly:

“Uncle, dear uncle, you can save him! You will save him! For my sake! Listen! At day-break—soon, soon now—he is to be before the shrine of Isis, where Kephren, the captain of the guard, is to meet him, with a cup containing a new poison come from Thessaly. Uncle, what can be done?”

The priest stood lost in thought for a moment, and then, while Iras eagerly watched his every movement he turned and unlocked a small cabinet which was imbedded in the wall of the room. Within were vials of all sizes and shapes. With



great care he selected one, and then closed and locked the door.

"I will do what I can," he said, slowly. "This is a powerful antidote, which has saved more than one victim, but whether it will have its effect in this case I cannot say."

As he spoke, a slender ray of light pierced through the low-barred window. Iras uttered a cry of alarm.

"Look! It is dawn! The hour has come!"

Serapion took her hand.

"Come!" he said.

He led her down the long corridor. At the end was a heavy door, which he pushed open, and before them appeared the interior of the Temple of Isis, with its lofty columns, covered with strange devices and inscriptions, its pavement of mosaic and its walls and dome stained in brilliant colors. At one end was the shrine of Isis, with the effigy of the Holy Mother herself. The shadows of the night still lay heavy within the temple, but Iras' sharp young eyes soon perceived through the gloom the figure of a slender young man, who was standing with clasped hands before the gilded railing.



"He is there," she whispered, beneath her breath.

Serapion drew her into the shadow of one of the pillars.

"Wait here," he said, "and not a word, not a sound."

Before the shrine of the great goddess the young man stood motionless. Slowly the light of day stole into the sacred place, chasing away the dusky shadows. Suddenly the silence was broken by the clatter of a horse's hoofs without, the hangings which veiled the great entrance were thrust aside and there strode into the temple a man of powerful build, with a strong, dark face and heavy black beard.

The newcomer advanced until he reached the side of the young Greek, who turned to meet him.

"At last," said Pharon, in a low tone. "The dawn is close at hand. If you had delayed longer I should have seen the light of another day. I have sworn that never again should my eyes behold Helios, the king of the skies. I swore it by the Styx. Kephren, would you make me a perurer? Did you do me the injury to doubt me?"



"No," replied the other. "I had your word, and the poison is ready."

"Give it to me."

Kephren drew from beneath his cloak a small cup, covered with a lid, and handed it to the young man.

The Greek took it into his hands, and then, in a clear voice, which had in it no suspicion of trembling, he said:

"You will tell her that I die without a regret."

But Kephren laid his hand upon his arm.

"What!" he said, "so careless in this your last hour? There is still time for prayer. Bid, at least, your farewell to life. You must not die without invoking your gods."

Pharon gently shook off the restraining hand, and raising his eyes to the dome, through the openings of which the light was gradually streaming stronger and stronger, he spoke as follows:

"Oh! Daughter of the Night! Oh! implacable goddess! Thou who hast no temple, and whom the sons of men fear to adore! Thou whom the unhappy, when misfortune overwhelms them, alone dare to address! Oh, Death! to thy embraces a mad love has consigned me! Spread thy dark wings and appear at my call! A woman



reigned over a people without number. Kings and gods were driven mad with her beauty. I was a slave, and I loved her in secret. I could never approach, nor hear her, but I followed her everywhere to catch a glimpse of her vail or her hand. One day I was brought into her presence. Oh ! Aphrodite ! all thy flames burned in my veins. To find favor in her eyes one must be a hero ; but I said : ' Queen, I am a slave, but I love you, and I ask for death.' And the new Isis whom Egypt worships deigned to smile upon the slave of the port. Come, then, Death ! I am ready to depart for thy somber shores. Take my youth, my life, and my future, but let me bear away to the shades the memory of her smile. Cleopatra is so beautiful ! Save me from forgetfulness ! Torture me as thou wilt in Hades, but let me suffer for her, let my love be my torment. Leave to my eyes her adored image, leave to my lips her cherished name ! I place myself in thy hands, oh, Death ! but on my icy forehead let the print remain of the kisses of her who made me a king !''

He ceased, and the first bright beam of the rising sun glided through the roof, and rested full upon his fair, upturned face.



With a quick motion, he raised the cup to his lips and drained it to the dregs. An ashen paleness overspread his cheeks, he staggered, and, with a long sigh, fell prostrate upon the ground.

A low cry broke from the lips of the girl hidden behind the pillar, and she would certainly have rushed forth if Serapion had not thrown his arms about her and prevented her doing so.

At this cry the captain of the guard turned quickly, but all was still again; and, thinking doubtless that it was an effect of his imagination, he fixed his eyes again upon the form that lay prone at his feet.

"Poor slave!" he murmured, half regretfully. "And yet you are happier than I. For you have lived, while the passion that consumes me is hopeless."

With a gesture as if to sweep aside the vision that rose before him he hastily walked away, the sound of his footsteps resounding hollowly through the vast edifice.

The hangings had scarcely fallen behind him when Iras, followed more slowly by the old priest, rushed from her place of concealment and sank on her knees beside Pharon's unconscious body.

"Quick, uncle, quick!" she gasped.



Serapion cast one look at the white face of the slave.

"It is too late, I fear," he said.

"No! No! He breathes still."

Serapion handed to his niece the vial he had taken from his room.

"Let him inhale it."

Iras lifted Pharon's head, and resting it in her lap, held the vial close to his nostrils. Scarcely daring to breathe, she watched for some sign of returning life. After some minutes, which were a long agony to the poor girl, the color slowly came back to the pale cheeks, and a long, shivering sigh issued from his lips.

Serapion bent over, and scrutinized him closely.

"The man is saved!" he said, at last. "I will answer for him now."

Iras uttered an exclamation of rapturous relief, and her happy tears fell upon the face in her lap.

"He will need careful nursing," continued Serapion. "Can you help me to carry him? He must not remain here."

"Can I?" she answered bravely, looking up with wet lashes. "I will."

Serapion, in his youth, had been a man of powerful muscles, and he still retained much of his



former strength. Putting his arms beneath the unconscious man's shoulders, he raised him from the ground, and, assisted by Iras, bore him away to a narrow, vaulted cell beneath the floor of the temple. In the room was a pallet, on which he deposited his burden.

"He will be safe here for the present," he said. "Remain with him until I return with a potion that is needed to give him back his strength and complete his cure."

Iras, alone with the man she had been instrumental in snatching from the very jaws of death, sank down beside him, and taking one of his hands in hers, raised it to her fresh young lips. She loved him, and without the shadow of hope; for he, whose eyes had looked upon the incomparable beauty of that royal Circe, who captured hearts only to cast them away dry and withered, would never learn to care for the modest sweetness of her Grecian handmaiden. What mattered that, however, at this moment? He was saved, and the bosom of the gentle girl swelled with infinite thankfulness.



## CHAPTER IV.

## IN THE LAND OF THE LOTUS.

In the magnificent palace of Rameses the Great, Cleopatra, the Queen, is holding high revelry, in honor of her illustrious guest.

Here, on the confines of the great Libyan desert, their life, for a month, has been an uninterrupted succession of festivals, hunting parties, luxurious feasts and voluptuous orgies. In her festivities each day more magnificent, in her repasts each day more sumptuous, in her ever increasing follies, the brilliant queen has taxed the resources of her kingdom. Her prodigality was unbounded. If the Falernian wines appeared insipid to her, she cast pearls in the cup to flavor it with melted jewels. Nothing could moderate the splendid recklessness of her caprices. Antony was astounded, blinded, intoxicated. And yet he was no novice in the art of gorgeous entertainment. Once, when the supper was good, he had presented a house to his cook. Dressed as Bac-



chus, he had driven through the country in a gilded car drawn by lions, and attended by a glittering retinue of merry-makers. But all his previous experiences paled into insignificance beside the superb spectacles of this month beneath the burning sun of Egypt. In the arms of his beautiful mistress the mighty triumvir has forgotten the whole world. Rome is no longer but a name, a name without meaning and without value. He lives only in the love-light of Cleopatra's dusky eyes; the universe is enclosed for him in the embrace of those perfect arms which would make the boasted arms of Hebe appear like those of some slave employed in menial labor.

And Cleopatra? Hitherto, this mistress of the art of charming had remained insensible herself. Of all the passions she had inspired, none had been really shared; she had been loved more than any other woman, but she had never loved. If men dishonored themselves, ruined themselves, died for her, she was indifferent to it all. She was like a beautiful, impassible sphinx, who smiled a changeless, exquisite smile, while combats were fought to the death at the foot of the pedestal, where she reigned supreme. But, suddenly, her sleeping heart had started with a



bound into pulsing, throbbing life. The comedy she had played with such perfection of art at Tarsus had become a reality in Memphis. The marble-hearted beauty, whom no homage, not even that of the great Cæsar, had ever touched to the quick, was now vanquished. With all the fiery, passionate temperament of a child of the sun, she now loved for the first time, loved so intensely as to cause deep suffering. If the light of the world shone for Antony from Cleopatra's eyes, so did the queen find in the azure orbs of the Roman all the heaven she knew or cared for.

To-day was to be a day of pleasures which should surpass all that had gone before. In the great hall of the palace, the grand festival was to take place—a hall of vast proportions, with walls of polished marble, inlaid with lapis lazuli, malachite and chalcedony. Enormous columns, emblazoned with hieroglyphics, representing the exploits of gods and heroes, supported upon their acanthus capitals gigantic arches of sculptured granite. The roof was an intricate network of gold and silver, through the meshes of which could be seen the blue of the sky. Between each pillar were placed enormous statues, figures with heads of bulls, dogs, and elephants, who sat in



their stone seats, impassive spectators of the gorgeous orgy beneath. Upon the floor were depicted in intricate mosaic scenes from Grecian mythology. One side of the hall was open to the air. Through arches of porphyry could be seen a broad terrace, flanked on each side by a sphinx with oblique eyes and pointed chin, who cast into the hall a fixed, mysterious gaze. From the terrace, flights of alabaster steps led down into the gardens, filled with mimosas, aloes, lemon trees, and carob plants. Vases of rose marble were filled with flowers of brilliant and variegated hues. Sculptured nymphs poured forth from their urns streams of perfumed water which fell with a gentle tinkle into basins of silver. Beyond flowed the Nile, and further still were the yellow sands of the desert. The massive tables groaned beneath the weight of rare viands brought at fabulous expense from all known countries. The wines of Crete, Falernum and the Massican hills sparkled and foamed in bowls of gold wreathed with flowers. Upon couches arranged in a semi-circle and covered with costly embroideries reclined in luxurious abandon the women of Cleopatra's household and the companions of Antony who had followed him into Egypt.



Among these latter was not Ventidius; the honest old veteran had returned to Rome filled with bitter regret at the weakness of the master he loved in spite of all.

Among the revellers circulated Asiatic pages, supplying their wants and sprinkling them with perfumes. Musicians, stationed out of sight, filled the air with soft, voluptuous music.

Upon a sort of throne, supported by golden griffins and strewn with rose leaves, sat side by side, Cleopatra and Antony. All about them were scattered lotus flowers, some of a creamy white, some of a celestial blue, and some of a tender rose color. Behind the throne stood Charmian and Iras, the queen's favorite attendants, waving to and fro large fans made of ibis plumes.

Cleopatra was radiant; never had she been more beautiful. She wore a robe of a pale, diaphanous blue, open at the sides and caught together with golden bees. About her slender waist was a girdle resplendent with gold and precious stones. Over her shoulders was thrown the royal mantle of sapphire blue, heavy with marvelous embroidery, and upon the silken masses of her dark hair rested a crown of serpents with flashing ruby eyes. High up on her



naked arms were twisted two strings of immense pearls. Priceless rings flashed upon her fingers and upon the toes of her bare feet, feet, with their nails as polished as onyx, more perfect than the alabaster feet of the goddess Isis.

Antony, with his head resting upon Cleopatra's shoulder, felt as if he had been transported by some magician into the realms of enchantment.

At a sign from the queen, there swarmed into the center of the hall a motley crowd of dwarfs and painted buffoons who executed grotesque dances and combats. To them succeeded young Greek girls who performed a slow, swaying, voluptuous dance with marvelous unanimity of movement. Then Cleopatra, Egypt's Queen, and Goddess Evergetes, among the immortals, arose from her throne, cast aside her royal mantle, replaced her diadem of serpents with a wreath of lotus flowers, adjusted to her tiny hands crotali of gold, instruments not unlike the Spanish castanets, and began to dance before Antony as half a century after Herodias danced before Herod. But while Herodias danced for a head, Cleopatra danced for a heart. With her beautiful rounded arms raised high above her head, and her lithe body balanced upon the tips of her rosy toes,



she advanced rapidly and brushed Antony's forehead with her lips. Then, retreating, she circled about him, sometimes leaning backward with half closed eyes and dishevelled hair like a Bacchante in the festival of the god of the grape, and sometimes laughing and more capricious in her movements than a butterfly amidst the flowers. It was a marvelous exhibition of voluptuous grace and languorous passion.

Antony's blood bounded hotly through his veins, and more madly than ever did he adore this incomparable siren of the Nile. To love Cleopatra was to love twenty women, to love all women, she was so changeable, so variable, so many-sided—a veritable chameleon. She knew with a thousand arts how to awaken satiated passion and to fix inconstancy itself.

At last, flushed and panting, she threw herself down beside her lover, and, winding her arms about him, pillowed her head upon his breast. He strained her to him in a rapturous ecstasy.

A smile that had something of sarcasm in it played about Charmian's lips. She remembered Cæsar. But a tear trembled on the lashes of the Greek girl, Iras. She was thinking of the slave who lay hidden in the cell beneath the temple of



Isis, the slave, whom she loved so deeply, and, alas! so hopelessly.

"My love!" murmured Antony, passionately.

"My love!"

"My dear lord!"

"Your beauty is like strong, new wine. It maddens one. Each glance of your eyes pierces deeper than the shafts of Eros. Venus, they say, was once jealous of Psyche, but to-day, Hathor, as the goddess of love is called in Egypt, must be jealous of Cleopatra."

With a quick motion, the queen raised her head.

"Hush!" she exclaimed, with a shudder, half superstition, half fear. "Hush! Do not tempt the anger of the gods!"

Antony smiled.

"What!" he said, "you, as brave and fierce as any of my warriors, afraid?"

"Not for myself! But for you! Ah! if aught should happen to part us now!"

"What can happen?"

"I know not, but as you spoke, a premonition, as of something evil, seized upon me. My hero, I could not exist without you. My life is bound up in yours. My death will take place the same



hour as yours. Charmian, summon Olympus before us."

Olympus was the physician whose duty it was to try new poisons, and, when a slave was condemned to death, to administer the potion and watch the effects.

"Olympus," said Cleopatra, as the physician appeared, in obedience to her commands, and made obeisance before her, "I have sent to question you as to your last discovery. What fresh poison have you obtained from your researches? Describe to me its effects?"

"Why now ask this?" said Antony. "Let our feast to-day be without its death's head."

But, with the willfulness of a spoiled child, she laid her hand upon his lips.

"Is there no deadly drug you can administer," she continued, turning again to Olympus, "so that the victim after death will not be disfigured, but preserve still every trace of the beauty which existed in life?"

"Oh! queen!" responded Olympus. "My art has not yet revealed to me what you demand."

"Then force your art! When Cleopatra speaks, she is to be obeyed!"



The physician folded his arms across his breast, and bowed his head in deep humility.

"There is no drug," he said, "but——"

"But? Speak, slave!"

"But there is a worm of the Nile, whose sting is death. The victim dies without changing a muscle. The roses still linger on the cheek, and the soul takes its flight in a smile."

"Is the death painless?"

"Absolutely."

"It is well. I shall remember. Retire."

Olympus bowed low, and turned away.

Cleopatra raised her lovely eyes to the face of her lover, who had listened in amazement to this conversation, and, taking his hand, pressed it convulsively to her lips.

"If I should lose you, my beloved," she murmured, "I would follow you even into the shades of death. In the scales of Amenti, our souls will be weighed together. But you are right. To-day, let us drive the grim specter from us. Charmian, a lute!"

With her white fingers, she struck a few, faint, lingering chords, and then, in a voice, as sweet and vibrating as a crystal bell, she sang as follows:



## THE LEGEND OF NITOCRIS.

Sleep, the High Priest of the world, had the universe shriven.

Fresh in the breath of the morn stood the meadow and wold.  
Clad, as if in a robe of innocence given,  
In dew unsullied by the lust of the day growing old.

Tinged by the mystical wand of the earliest rays of the morning  
Cloudlets fringed as with gold in an opal ocean swim,  
While through the orchard-aisles, the grace of the dawn adorn-  
ing,  
Fair and alone does Nitocris steal to the river's brim.

Sudden a noise in the reeds, the birds from their slumbering  
frightens ;  
Still stands the maiden, intent, poised like a wave at its turn,  
While an Aurora-like flush o'er her features rises and lightens,  
Lest her but slightly-veiled charms a too early boatman dis-  
cern.

But not so much as a ripple has shattered the glass of the river;  
Falls from her shoulders the tunic, when loosed is the clasp  
that had kept;  
Crossing her hands on her bosom, she stoops with an infantile  
shiver,  
To gaze in innocent pride at the sandals from which she has  
stept.

Gleams her young form in the sun like old Neptune's new-risen  
daughter,  
Mirrored below in the depths of the slow-flowing Nile.  
Prettily one little foot then timidly ripples the water,  
Mocks she the image destroyed, with the gleam of a banter-  
ing smile.

Trippingly over the waters, the sunlight sparkles and glances—  
Bosom and shoulder and limb with its vermil-hued pencil  
dyes.



Coyly, as if to a lover, the maid in the river advances:

Gladly to welcome their mistress the wavelets caressingly rise.

Gayly the swimmer snatches a lotus the currents give her,

Binds it amongst the tresses that vie with the raven's wing;

Floats secure and at rest on the breast of the slow-moving river,

Radiant and happy and fair—fair as the bride of a king.

Hark? she has screamed in dismay. While into the blue  
above her,

Risen on palpitant wings, with, light in his talons caught

One little sandal of red, an eagle is seen to hover—

Sandal as light as a leaf, yet with fortunes of Empire fraught.

Tumbled it down at the foot of a prince—but a prince and a  
lover—

Saucily tapered its heel and its pink toe curled in air.

Swore he to marry the maid whose foot bore so dainty a cover;

Found he the bather and crowned her—Nitocris the Fair!

The lute dropped carelessly from her hand and the last word died away in one long, full note, when suddenly at the end of the vast hall arose a commotion. The revellers started from their couches, and two men in the armour of the Roman legions appeared from without and made their way hurriedly to the foot of the platform upon which reclined the queen and the triumvir. As Antony's eyes fell on the scarred, grizzled face of the one in advance, he started to his feet with a cry:

“Ventidius!”



## CHAPTER V.

GO, MY HERO! SAVE ROME!

Cleopatra's face grew dark with anger and foreboding. She, too, arose, and with an imperious gesture demanded, angrily:

"What means this unseemly intrusion into our presence?"

The younger man, Eros, whose cheeks were still smooth and fair as a girl's, blushed and cast down his eyes before the flashing glance of the indignant queen. But the hardened old warhorse, Ventidius, answered, boldly:

"I come with grave news to my master. Fulvia, his wife, is dead."

"What!" exclaimed Antony, descending to his lieutenant's side. "Fulvia!"

"Dead, my lord."

Cleopatra sank back upon the couch, trembling like an aspen. What direful results would this news bring about? Eagerly, fearfully, she lis-



tened to each word. One by one, the comrades of Antony had drawn near, and stood silently by to hear the news from Rome.

"Fulvia dead!" exclaimed Antony again. "When did this happen?"

"Two weeks since."

"Poor woman! She had a noble soul, although I loved her not."

"Her last thoughts were of you. Her last words recalled you to Italy."

"To Italy?"

"Yes, to Italy," repeated Ventidius, slowly and sternly. "Rome is in danger. Lepidus is a figure head. Sextus Pompey no longer fears you. He holds the sea; his fleets cover the Mediterranean, from Cyprus to the Columns of Hercules. He intercepts the arrival of wheat from Sicily and Africa. Rome is threatened with famine."

Ventidius paused, but Antony made no reply. His eyes were bent upon the ground and his brow was wrinkled as if in thought.

"What!" exclaimed Ventidius, in vain attempting to conceal his scorn and disappointment. "Rome in danger, and Antony hesitates. Ah! that I should live to see this day! General! Emperor! Without you, Rome is lost! The father-



land demands you, and can you shamefully forget it for an unworthy love!"

This time, his words were answered. With a gesture of angry menace, Antony strode toward him.

"Silence!" he thundered. "Not one word more like that! How dare——"

But, swift as an arrow, the queen had descended to his side, and laid her soft hand upon his arm.

"Not for me must you quarrel," she said. "Remember, this man was the conqueror of the Parthians."

As Antony looked into the face he adored, his anger melted. He threw his arm about her, and drew her toward him. Then, turning again to Ventidius, he said:

"It is to the woman you have reviled that you owe your pardon. Take back to ungrateful Rome this my answer. Let her extricate herself from her difficulties as best she may. Let Octavius do as he chooses. I care not. I am happy here and here I will remain."

In an ecstasy of joy, Cleopatra raised her eyes to his face.

"My Antony!" she murmured. "Am I then all this to you?"



"All the world," he returned, passionately.

Ventidius realized that he was beaten.

How could he have hoped to prevail against this Circe who held the greatest warrior of the world thus fast in the silken meshes of her web of enchantment? The old soldier's heart was sad and bitter. Like all of Antony's captains and soldiers, Ventidius adored the emperor, as he was fondly called in the army; for Mark Antony possessed in a wonderful measure those qualities which inspire loyalty and devotion: bravery, frankness, generosity. Without Antony there was no hope for Rome, for that Rome, which was Ventidius' country, and for whose honor and glory he had fought all his life long. In spite of all, he would make one more effort. The spell of Cleopatra's magic was complete. She and she alone could induce this recreant leader to return to his duty.

There was something pathetic in the way the old warrior now spoke, addressing this time not the master whom he loved, but the being who held that master in her power, and whom he hated and feared.

"Great queen," he said, "you have called me the conqueror of the Parthians. No, not I! I



only obeyed. The conqueror was he—Antony. Queen, he has refused to listen to the voice of his duty, but to his old friends he owes some regard. He should appear and reanimate their faith now war is again upon them. If I return without him Rome will say that he is a slave here in Egypt, and the Senate will denounce him. Be you, now, his better spirit. Let Rome believe for a single day that Antony has returned, and Cæsar is lost.”

Once or twice during this speech Antony had attempted to interrupt, but Cleopatra had prevented him. She had listened with the crimson going and coming upon her fair cheek. Something in Ventidius' words had roused to life the sleeping ambition, once so indomitable, of this many sided woman. Next to her love for Antony, her love of power was her strongest passion. For her, to reign was the same thing as to live. Then, of all beings on earth, she hated and feared Octavius. Revenge and gratified ambition were within her grasp. Yes! Let her lover save Rome; let there be but one world, and that world Cæsar's capital and its sovereigns Mark Antony and Cleopatra. The daughter of the Ptolemies, with the aid of Antony, would be queen of all the world. He must go, and go at once.



With all the arts of which she was past mistress; with all the tender, seductive accents of her caressing voice, she pointed out to her reluctant lover the path wherein his duty lay; she showed to him that his desertion opened to Octavius the absolute rulership of Rome; she encouraged him, she awakened in him all his old ambition, all his old longing for triumph and power. And, although at first he turned to all her entreaties and arguments a deaf ear, she finally persuaded him to depart.

"Who can resist you, oh, Royal Egypt?" he said, at last. "Now, as ever, I will obey your commands."

"Yes," she cried, enthusiastically. "Glory before all!"

Then, with a quick transition, she threw herself, with a burst of sobs, into his arms.

"Go! Go! But be faithful to me, and return quickly."

Led by Ventidius, who was half delirious at the thought that after all, and just when it had seemed most hopeless, his mission was to be crowned with success, a mighty shout went up from the Roman soldiers.



“Long live Antony! Long live our Emperor! Long live Cleopatra the queen!”

The vessel which had brought Ventidius and Eros was waiting at the quay to convey them to Rome.

With her own hands the queen helped to arm her lover. She had moulded him to suit her own will; but now that separation was imminent, despite her undaunted nature, all her fears and weaknesses of a loving woman were aroused. She lavished upon him the most tender caresses, mingled with broken words.

“Ah! to separate! It is cruel! and it is my words that have brought it about. Ah! you do not love me, or you would not go. No, no—I mean it not. You must, you shall go; I wish it.”

As, through her blinding tears, she buckled his cuirass, one of the sharp points wounded her finger and a drop of bright blood trickled slowly down Antony's white corselet.

As she perceived the crimson stain, she turned pale as death, and, with a cry of horror, she clung frantically to him.

“It is an omen—an omen of evil! We shall never meet again. Ah! swear to me that you will return!”



"I swear it by all the gods of Olympus!"

"If aught happens to you, my Antony, I follow you—I follow you. The time has come to part. Ah, that spot of red! It will be ever before my eyes, until I look upon your face again. How to live these weary days, alone, and tortured by anxiety! How to suppress them! Give me drugs to render them shorter! You love me?"

"Love you, my queen? Forever! Far or near, you fill my whole existence."

"Forgive me; I am weak. See, my tears are gone! Glory awaits you! Go, save Rome! Farewell, my hero, my life, my god! Farewell!"

One last vow of eternal love—one long, tender, clinging embrace—then he tore himself away from her, and, followed by Ventidius, Eros, and the rest of the Romans, rushed out upon the terrace and dashed down through the garden toward the quay.

With arms outstretched and her draperies hovering about her like wings, Cleopatra flew after him up the steps and out upon the platform. With feline-like agility, she leaped upon the pedestal of one of the Sphinxes, and clinging with one arm to the image, no less strange and inscrut-



able than herself, she waved with the other to the departing warrior a last farewell.

But when he had passed from her sight she slowly, slowly descended, with many a backward glance, and returned to the banquet hall.

The revellers had returned to the tables, and the buffoons and dancers were gathered together in the center of the great apartment.

Suddenly, with flashing eyes and crimsoned cheeks, the queen was in their midst. Frantically she tore the garlands of roses from off the massive bowls of wine, and trampled them with fierce passion beneath her feet.

"Out of my sight!" she cried, in a voice that made all the motley crowd of courtiers and slaves shrink back in terror. "Idiots! Fools! Out of my sight! Away from here, I say! No more music! No more feasting! Away! Away! All of you! There shall be nothing but mourning until he returns!"



## CHAPTER VI.

## ILLUSIONS DISPELLED.

For six weeks had Pharon, the Greek slave, who, like Ixion, had fallen in love with one far above him, grasped in his arms only a cloud, and was doomed henceforth to suffer the torments of Hades—for six weeks had Pharon lain concealed in the vault beneath the Temple of Isis. Poor Iras, no less unfortunate than he, perhaps, had nursed him back to health. She did not dare to tell him the truth, but by inference, if not by actual speech, had allowed him to believe that Cleopatra had, at the last moment, relented and spared his life.

Whenever the Greek girl could be spared from her duties at the palace, which was not too often, she hastened to the temple, finding a strange satisfaction, half pain, half joy, in being near and ministering to the man she loved and whose life she had saved. Does one who really loves ever



love absolutely without hope? No matter how apparently impassable are the obstacles, how black the future may look, is there not always deep buried a faint belief that some day all will come right and our desires find fruition? At all events, it was so with Iras. When Pharon greeted her coming with pleasure, when he expressed his gratitude, she saw in it the possible dawning of love. Alas! if she had but known the pleasure her presence gave him was that of seeing some one who had been near the queen, the gratitude was to the one whom he supposed to be in some measure Cleopatra's vice-regent.

To Serapion, the knowledge that he was harboring this man in concealment, was a constant source of anxiety and even terror. Should the facts come to the queen's ears, not even his priestly calling would avail to save his life. Twenty times had he concocted some scheme to be rid of his unwelcome guest, and twenty times had he allowed himself to be won from his project by his niece's entreaties. Iras, herself, knew that the time must come when Pharon must be told the truth and aided to escape to Greece. But, day after day, she put off the fatal hour that would separate him from her.



"Iras," he said to her one day, "what are the queen's wishes? How long is it her will that I am to remain here?"

The girl turned pale, and faltered:

"I—I cannot tell."

"You cannot tell?" he exclaimed, in surprise. "But, surely, you are in her confidence?"

"In her confidence—yes—but, she has not said. Oh! she——"

"Well, speak."

Iras saw that at last the time had come. But, what could she say? If she told him the whole truth, would he consent to receive his life at her hands? Would he not consider himself still bound by his oath? No! that would be too terrible, that she could not risk.

"You must understand, Pharon," she said, at last, "that, after—after what occurred, it would be impossible for you to remain in Egypt. It is the queen's commands," she went on more boldly, "that you leave this land forever, and never again appear in her presence."

For a moment, he made no answer, and then he said, quietly:

"The queen relented. Whatever the queen's



commands may be, they shall be obeyed. When am I to depart?"

"I—I do not know. I will tell you, to-morrow."

And as the thought struck her, like a blow, that what she had so long dreaded would now soon come to pass, her fortitude gave way, and, burying her face in her hands, she burst into tears.

Pharon gazed at her in astonishment.

"What is it, Iras?" he asked, kindly.

"To have you go," she sobbed. "Oh, Pharon, why can I not go with you? Greece is my native land, too."

At these words, perhaps something of the truth was revealed to him, for a look of deep compassion was on his face, as he answered gently:

"Poor child! No, I go alone—alone, to forget the torment of my love until it pleases the gods to release me."

Iras wiped away the glittering drops that rested on her lashes, and, forcing a smile, said:

"Till to-morrow, then."

"Till to-morrow. You have been more than kind to me, dear child, and I thank you." And, drawing her toward him, he pressed upon her



forehead such a kiss as a brother might have given a sister.

Without a word, she turned and hurriedly left the cell, leaving him alone.

Throwing himself down upon the pallet bed, he gave himself up to his thoughts. What remained to him in life? To-morrow he would return to Greece, where his boyhood had been passed, but not to find there the peace of his early days. Who could know peace again, after once having loved that pearl among women? Away from the sunlight of her smile, all would be dark as the shades of Erebus. Why had he been brought back to this earth to long unceasingly for the unattainable? And yet it was her wish. She had relented. To be even the object of her pity was something. If it was her wish that he should live, what was he that he should dare to oppose it? And yet how much better it would have been for him if he had been left to die? He was young yet, and before him stretched an endless vista of sorrowful years.

He closed his eyes, as if to shut out the vision of what was before him. When he opened them again he started from his couch with an exclamation of mingled bewilderment and alarm. At his



side stood the tall figure of a man, with a dark complexion, thin lips, and narrow, slanting eyes.

"Diomedes!" exclaimed Pharon. "Diomedes! You here!"

And instinctively he glanced about him, as if seeking some weapon of defense.

Diomedes understood the look, and with a half scornful smile, said:

"Fear not! I am here as a friend, not as an enemy."

"But how have you discovered me?" asked the Greek, in bewilderment.

"When one has the key to an enigma, it is not difficult to unlock it. A woman in love betrays herself to those who have eyes to see."

For an instant a flood of joy and hope overwhelmed the young Greek. Trembling in every limb, he gasped:

"Cleopatra!"

The dark-faced man laughed aloud, a laugh not pleasant to hear.

"Cleopatra! Poor fool, are you still mad? I said a woman in love. Who, day after day, has sought this temple?"

"Iras!"

"Yes, Iras. Too fair a damsel, I think, to have



her devotion cast aside like a worthless bauble."

"So! You have followed her?" said Pharon, out of whose face all light had died. There was but one woman on earth to him. What mattered the others? To Iras he was grateful, in a certain sense, but there all feeling ended.

"Yes," returned Diomedes, "I followed her, at first, out of idle curiosity, and then, for a different motive, for what might be to my own advantage."

"Explain!"

The whole expression of the Egyptian's face changed, and he spoke in a far different tone from what he had used before.

"Listen, and weigh well what I have to say. You, who were condemned to death, are still alive. How this has happened I know not. Kephren has reported that you kept your word. What jugglery has been used matters but little."

"Jugglery!" interrupted Pharon, angrily. "There was no jugglery. I did keep my word. I took the poison. But before it was too late, the handmaiden of the queen, who was ready with an antidote, saved my life. Cleopatra had repented her cruel edict and had sent Iras to save me."

"Cleopatra repented!" echoed the other, with a sneering laugh. "She repent! As soon expect



the marble statue of Isis to descend from her pedestal and interfere. Poor dupe! If what you say is true, it was Iras, and Iras alone, that saved you. Cleopatra believes you dead and rejoices at the fact. She——”

But two lithe, sinewy hands were about his throat and choked his further utterance. Pharon, beside himself with anger, shook him like a reed in his powerful grasp, and hurled him from him. Gasping and half-strangled, Diomedes fell upon the pallet.

For an instant, save for the heavy breathing of the two men, there was silence in the little cell.

The Greek was the first to recover himself. With an effort, he approached to where his victim lay. Diomedes crept closer to the wall.

“Oh! have no fear!” said Pharon. “My anger is spent. I was wrong. After all, you may be right. Speak! Tell me all that you know. But, as you fear the vengeance of the gods, speak the truth.”

Diomedes, somewhat reassured, rose slowly and painfully to his feet. His breast heaved with anger, but it was an anger he did not dare give vent to. Dissimulation and trickery were his weapons.



"If I speak the truth," he said, "will it meet with the scurvy reception you have already given it?"

Pharon, who had suddenly grown very white, threw himself down upon a stool in the corner of the cell.

"Go on!" he said. "Whatever you may say, I will not lay hands upon you again. You have my word."

Diomedes gave him a sharp glance, and, apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, began as follows:

"You have been deceived. I have already told you the truth. Must I repeat it?"

"Cleopatra believes me dead, and rejoices in that belief?"

"Yes."

"Oh, fool that I have been!"

He saw it all now. And yet it was chiefly his own fault that he had fallen into the mad error.

"There is one thing yet you can have," said Diomedes, slowly.

"And that is?" was the weary response.

"Revenge!"

"Revenge? On whom? Not on the girl who saved my life! It is not her fault that I am mad.



Not on Cleopatra. The bargain was a bargain, and I have failed to keep my word, but I will keep it yet."

Diomedes' face fell. He had thought through this man to serve his own ends, to obtain his own revenge. Two years before, for some trivial offense, the queen had ordered him to be publicly beaten. The sentence was carried out. Since then he had been returned to favor, and Cleopatra had probably forgotten the whole occurrence. But not so with Diomedes. Crafty, sly, and cowardly, he bided his time. To further his own ends, he had made friends, at Tarsus, with Ventidius. His one object and aim was to lower the haughty spirit of the woman, queen though she was, who had humiliated him, and to make her suffer, in mind, at least, the tortures she had inflicted upon him. Of late it had seemed to him that his day of triumph might not be far distant. Through her love for this Roman could he not strike? When, through spying upon Iras, he had discovered that this slave, Pharon, was still alive, he fancied that he had the instrument at his hand, but he was disappointed; the Greek was more honest and single-minded than he had thought.

"You have kept your word," he said, at last;



"it is not your fault that the poison failed of its effect."

"It will not fail a second time."

"Cleopatra is happy. She cares not now. Her only thought is for her new lover."

Pharon started.

"Her new lover!"

Then Diomedes related briefly the visit of the queen to Tarsus, her victory over the Roman triumvir, and her own final enslavement—a captive in the chains of Eros.

To all this the Greek listened with varying emotions, at first with maddening jealousy, which, however, soon gave way to a feeling of numb despair. What mattered it, after all? He was to die.

"Ah!" he murmured, half aloud, as Diomedes finished. "If I could but look upon that face once more!"

"It is not impossible," answered Diomedes, eagerly.

"Not impossible!" exclaimed Pharon, no less eagerly, his face flushing scarlet. "Show me the way, and I am your friend for life! Ah," he added, with sad sarcasm, "that is not for long."

"Long enough to accomplish what I wish."



Then, with much persuasive and subtle eloquence, Diomedes disclosed what he wished the slave to do, promising him in return to bring him in disguise into the presence of the queen herself, where he could drink to the full the intoxication of her beauty.

At first Pharon demurred. The favor asked seemed in itself but little, but what lay behind it he did not know. He had been slightly acquainted with the Egyptian, at the time that he was a boatman of the Nile. He knew but little of him, but he felt an instinctive distrust of him. The unquenchable thirst which had taken possession of him to gaze upon the face of her who was at once his joy and his ruin proved too strong for him, however; little by little he allowed himself to be persuaded, and ended by agreeing to do what Diomedes asked of him.



## CHAPTER VII.

## VARIUM ET MUTABILE.

When Iras returned to the palace, she had no time to indulge in the grief that consumed her at the impending separation from Pharon, for her royal mistress had sent for her, and she was obliged to obey at once the summons. Hastily bathing her eyes and removing from her cheeks the traces of her tears, she hurried to a small room in a wing of the palace which bordered one side of the gardens, and where Cleopatra was wont at this hour to give audience to the philosophers, sages, and scientists, it delighted her to honor.

Incomparable in beauty as was this royal daughter of the Nile, she was no less matchless in intelligence. In fact, perhaps her most distin-



guishing characteristic was her lofty intellect. To the most seductive graces a woman ever possessed she added the genius of a man. She spoke seventeen languages, was a skillful musician, and an excellent poet; she had studied all the sciences of which there was then any knowledge, and the best schools of which were established at Alexandria; she could converse with the sages upon all branches of human knowledge, as easily as she could converse with the ambassadors of all nations in their own tongue. When to this sovereign intelligence are added, sovereign beauty, and the possession of sovereign power in a country and at a time when the existences of millions of men converged toward a single point, the existence of the king—it is not strange to understand why she was hailed by her people as “moderator of the world, mistress of the living, ruler of nations,” and proclaimed “Goddess Evergetes, living queen of above and below, eye of light, the favorite of the sun.”

The apartment in which Iras sought the queen was more Greek than Egyptian in its decorations. The walls were painted a deep blue with a delicate tracery of white and gold. Low chairs of Athenian design were scattered here and there;



near the broad window was a couch, covered with embroidered cushions, for Cleopatra always preferred reclining to sitting, knowing full well that the former attitude lent itself more readily to picturesque poses. At intervals, upon brackets fixed to the walls, were busts of the greatest Greek philosophers and poets, and side by side hung the tragic and the comic mask, for the queen was passionately fond of theatrical representations of every description. Above the couch were the busts of Sappho, the ill-fated poetess of Lesbos, and Aspasia, the brilliant friend of Pericles.

Cleopatra lay among the silken cushions, attended by Charmian, and surrounded by men all eminent in their various callings. Near by, were slaves holding architectural and astronomical instruments.

As Iras entered, her uncle, Serapion, the grand priest of Isis, was reading aloud from a sacred book, supported upon the back of an acolyte of the temple.

"Athyr is chaos, profound darkness, the bed beneath the waters where the world awoke. Pirami is day, the radiant spirit. Kneph is the creator, the father of all the gods. Phtah, his



son, the god of fire, is the king of the thunder; he created the heavens, he created the earth. The evil is in Typhon; the good in Osiris, brother and divine spouse of the immortal Isis. Toth, the revealer, invented writing; Toth knows all the secrets that nature veils. Tmei is justice; Athor is beauty; the union of both forms Truth. Amenti is the abyss into which souls descend, and where, after death, their judges await them. There their lives are revealed, and there are weighed their good and evil deeds."

The old man paused, and Cleopatra, supporting her head upon one rounded, polished arm, said, gravely:

"Great are the gods, greater even than kings. I will be present to-morrow at the festival of Isis."

Serapion closed the book, which the acolyte bore away, and, bending low before his sovereign, replied:

"The gods are gracious to us, when the queen prays to them; and the happy people imitate her piety."

Then to each in turn did Cleopatra, the great queen and arbiter of all, give audience.

A philosopher of the school at Alexandria



stated that Egiras of Lamos asked permission to be admitted to the school.

"Admit him as a pupil," replied Cleopatra, after a moment's thought. "He is not without talent."

She next examined the plans submitted to her for a new temple of Hermes, approved them, and ordered the architect to push on the work without delay.

Then, motioning to approach a man with a dark, curling beard, and keen, intelligent face, who was the custodian of the royal library, she asked:

"And you, Seleucus, how many new volumes have you procured this month?"

"A thousand."

"That will go but a little way toward replacing those that were destroyed by the flames."

"Ah!" said Seleucus the librarian, with a sigh, "if we but had the treasures of Pergamos, works without price. But to obtain them——"

"Well, what would be necessary?"

"A word from the triumvir."

"You shall have the books. Antony must repair the damage that Cæsar wrought us."

"On your knees, all!" exclaimed the librarian. "Favorite of Isis, receive our grateful thanks."

But, with a charming smile, Cleopatra arose,



and stretched out her hands to the kneeling sages.

“Rise!” she commanded. “Philosophers, sages, scholars, rise! It pains me to see you in that humble attitude. You, who represent the arts and sciences, have a right to have your wishes gratified. Before judging, the world awaits your judgments. By you, Egypt has been placed in the first rank of nations. With us, what makes man great is thought; and the head of the thinker, like the head of a king, should never be lowered, not even before me.”

One by one, the grateful men, with protestations of devotion, kissed her fair hand and took their leave.

The audience was over, and the queen was alone with her maidens.

With a sigh of weariness, Cleopatra crossed to the window and looked out upon the landscape that lay hot and parched beneath the torrid rays of the midday sun. There was not a cloud in the changeless azure of the sky. The green Nile flowed sluggishly between its reddish banks. The leaves of the flowers and bushes in the garden hung limp and lifeless, with no breath of air to refresh them.



Cleopatra raised her hands and removed her head-dress—a sort of golden helmet—formed of the body and wings of the sacred bird. Handing it to Iras, she thrust back the dark masses of her hair behind her ears of a daintier pink than the shell from which Venus, the sea-born, emerged.

“How to pass this weary time of waiting,” she murmured. “He has been gone ten days, and it seems ten centuries.”

“Will it please you to listen to the singers of Ionia?” asked Charmian. “They are without.”

“No, Charmian, no. Their noise fatigues me. Send the singers away. Ah! Isis, I have paid too much for your lying oracles. They promised me that I should hear from Antony to-day. The hour has passed. They have deceived me. In vain I look forth. There is no boat upon the Nile, no cloud of dust upon the deserted road.”

“Perhaps,” ventured Iras, timidly, “his plans have not succeeded, and the rebellious mob refuses him obedience.”

Cleopatra shot upon her a glance of superb disdain.

“Iras,” she said, imperiously, “doubt the gods if you will, but not his power.”



But, still, the words of the girl turned the thoughts of the love-sick queen in another direction.

At first each day had brought a messenger from Antony, but now for two days no word had been received from him. Ye gods! suppose he had made his peace with Cæsar, and together they had agreed to drive from the seas the pirate, Pompey, and recapture Sicily! Perhaps, the sending of Ventidius had been a stratagem. Octavius had need of Antony, and Rome, who knew the Egyptian Queen and her power, was afraid of her love, that had once captured the great Julius. No! no! she would not think of that. It was impossible, folly. But, oh, how she longed for Antony's return! How slow the hours passed! How overpowering was that breathless heat! Not a cloud in the sky, not a drop of water in the pitiless azure of those heavens that knew no winter, spring nor autumn; forever that red sun like a great, bloody eye always wakeful and watching!

"Ah!" she exclaimed, aloud, with a petulant gesture. "Iras! Charmian! I would give these pearls, this bracelet for a drop of rain. Life in Egypt is a heavy burden. This rich country,



with so many just claims to celebrity, is, for me, a young queen, a sad, funereal kingdom. Let Egypt boast of its palaces and monuments, but the finest of all are only tombs. Beneath one's feet sleep generations of motionless mummies. It is like a country wrapped in eternal remorse for its crimes. The work of the living is to embalm the dead. Everywhere are furnaces in which bodies are being consumed. Everywhere is the acrid odor of naphtha and bitumen. Everywhere does human pride struggle miserably with eternity. What matter these remains of people who have long since ceased to breathe? Monstrous art of embalming! I hate your false, vain marvels! Everything in this country, everything is odious to me; everything inspires me with horror, even its beauties, even its illustrious river there, an enigma in its course, and whose source has been sought for in vain for three thousand years. Why, if that stream should disdain to overflow, dealing as it does death and destruction, this country would lose all, its glory and its fortune. Oh! how sad it is to have ever before my eyes that mournful river, with its silent flow, and to place my hopes in its eternal ravages. Mystery and granite, such is Egypt! A terrible



country for a young woman to live in, for a young queen to rule over!"

Charmian smiled, a little maliciously. She had been so often the queen's confidant, that, spoiled favorite that she was, she permitted herself little liberties of speech which no one else would have dared venture.

"If Egypt is hated now," she said, "it was loved once. Ah! if this beautiful country has lost all its claims to affection, it is because Asia has been seen and remembered, because a tender regret renders the heart unfaithful, because the cold Cydnus has dethroned the Nile. What a charming voyage that was. Do you remember, Iras? I was at the prow, dressed as a siren."

Thus addressed, Iras, who had been listlessly listening, with her thoughts far away, started and said, with an effort:

"I? You forget. I was not there."

The queen's eyes sparkled as she remembered that day of her victory. Egypt for the moment was forgotten. Once more she was on the waters of the Cydnus, bearing away in triumph her willing prey.

"Ah," she said, a smile wreathing her red lips, "and he accused me, treated me as a rebel!"



"How startled he was," said Charmian, "when I raised your vail. How dazzled he was by your beauty."

"Yes," said Cleopatra. "He intended to punish me—me! He accused me openly of having aided the savage Brutus; but, at the sound of my voice alone, that terrible suspicion took flight. He spoke no more to me of Brutus. Oh! Charmian, you did well to recall the joy of that day. When he returns, he shall see me again, as he saw me then. Go and bring the crown I wore that day and that he admired. Go! I wish to see it."

But Charmian had scarcely departed when Cleopatra's mood changed again.

"No," she said to Iras, her face clouding over. "I was wrong to listen to her. That memory but saddens me the more. In his absence, it is vain to resist this hideous gloom."

With a gesture of hopeless longing, she flung herself down upon the cushions.

Iras looked at her mistress with a sorrowful expression in her blue eyes.

"Ah!" she thought, "her love is returned, while mine——"

Timidly she approached the recumbent queen.



"I feel how powerless I am to amuse you," she said, softly. "But shall I try to read to you? An ode of Sappho's?"

Cleopatra raised her head, and laughed aloud, with sarcastic and yet not unkindly amusement.

"Sappho! My poor child, I envy your simplicity. Do you think to cure love with verses flaming with passion? To calm my mind with those delirious avowals? However, take the book and read them, if you like."

Iras selected a small volume from a table covered with books of all descriptions, and, seeing that her mistress had composed herself to listen, began to read in a calm, monotonous voice:

"Peer of gods he seemeth to me, the blissful  
Man who sits and gazes at thee before him,  
Close beside thee sits, and in silence——"

She broke off in alarm, for Cleopatra had suddenly leaped from the couch and snatched the book impetuously from her hand, exclaiming, impatiently:

"Oh! how badly you read! It is plain to be seen that you have never loved! You have no conception of the words written here."

Then, with marvelous cadences, her exquisite voice now throbbing with tenderness, now pulsat-



ing with fierce, hot passion, she half declaimed, half sung, the verses of the love-lorn poetess :

“Peer of gods he seemeth to me, the blissful  
Man who sits and gazes at thee before him,  
Close beside thee sits, and in silence hears thee  
Silverly speaking,  
Laughing love’s low laughter. Oh, this, this only  
Stirs the troubled heart in my breast to tremble!  
For should I but see thee a little moment,  
Straight is my voice hushed;  
Yea, my tongue is broken, and through and through me,  
’Neath the flesh, impalpable fire runs tingling,  
Nothing sees mine eyes, and a noise of roaring  
Waves in my ear sounds;  
Sweat runs down in rivers, a tremor seizes  
All my limbs, and paler than grass in autumn,  
Caught by pains of menacing death, I falter,  
Lost in the love trance.” \*

As the last notes died away in tremulous silence she started, and furiously flung from her the book, which fell with a crash upon the marble floor.

“Those verses have driven me mad! So have I felt at his glance, at his voice, at his touch! Girl, what foul fiend inspired you to think of Sappho?”

But her words fell upon ears that heard not. With pale lips and eyes wild with fright, Iras was

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\*Symond’s Translation.



staring out into the garden. Was it a specter, or had she really seen Pharon glide by and conceal himself behind a mass of foliage in the garden below?

Cleopatra noticed the terror frozen upon the girl's face, and, alarmed herself, she seized her by the arm.

"Iras! What is it? What has happened?"

"Nothing! Nothing!" was the stammering reply. "I—I——"

In amazement, the queen followed the direction of the girl's eyes.

"Ah!" she cried, tightening her grasp upon Iras' arm. "What movement is that among the leaves of that plant."

As if by magic, Iras recovered herself. The danger of the man she loved nerved her to desperation. At all odds, she must prevent his discovery.

"It is nothing," she said, "the breeze stirs the leaves."

"Breeze, child? There is no breeze. Look! Do you not see the shadow of a bow upon the wall, beyond the sphinx?"

As she spoke, a hissing sound was heard, and an arrow flew through the air and planted itself



in the cedar casement of the window. Cleopatra staggered back, almost fainting with fright.

"An arrow!" she screamed. "My guards! Kephren! My guards! Cæsar, I recognize your infamy in this. That archer is one of your emissaries; that arrow was meant for me. My guards! My guards!"

Attracted by her cries, Kephren, followed by two immense Ethiopians, with lions' skins about their shoulders, and armed with bow and spear, rushed into the room.

Cleopatra rapidly explained, and they dashed through the window, out into the garden; but all their search was vain. A bow lay beneath the bushes, but the offender had disappeared.

Meanwhile Iras had drawn the quivering arrow from the woodwork. A roll of papyrus was wrapped about the dart. Quick as lightning Iras removed it, but not before Cleopatra had observed it.

"A message!" exclaimed the queen. "I laugh at my alarm. But how did that archer escape my guards? Give it to me—I will read it."

But Iras had already read the words inscribed upon the parchment. With a sigh of relief, as



she had feared to see there she knew not what, she handed the message to Cleopatra.

Upon the papyrus were these words :

“Queen, Antony deceives you, and you await him in vain.”

As Cleopatra read, the color forsook her cheeks and she seemed about to fall, but in another moment she had recovered herself, and in cold, measured tones she said to Kephren, who had returned from his fruitless quest.

“In twenty-four hours, produce before me the man who fired that arrow, or your head shall pay the penalty. Go !”

With heavy step, Kephren, followed by his Ethiopians, left the room. To have incurred the displeasure of his royal mistress was worse than death itself to the captain of the guards, who lived but in the sunshine of her favor.

As he vanished, Charmian entered from an opposite door, bearing the crown for which she had been sent.

Knowing nothing of what had occurred, she exclaimed, gayly :

“Here is the crown, the evoker of precious memories. Iras, help me to——”

But Cleopatra waved her back.



"What does this message mean?" she muttered between her clenched teeth. "Oh, fool that I am! It is nothing—the work of a madman. I will trust him! I *will* trust him! Thus do I banish all suspicion from my heart!" And tearing the parchment into fragments she flung them from her.

Then stretching out her arms, wearily and pit-  
eously:

"Charmian! Iras! Help me, my women, to my chamber. My eyes are heavy, and I fain would sleep."



## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE DEAD ALIVE.

Cleopatra slept, an uneasy, fitful slumber, disturbed by sudden starts and cries.

By her side watched Iras, longing eagerly for the moment to come when she could escape and fly to the temple, warn Serapion, and discover, if possible, why Pharon had left his hiding-place. The suspense was horrible. How happy she would be now if the thing she once had dreaded had come to pass, and Pharon was far from her, safe in Greece. At any moment Kephren might discover him, and this time no power on earth could save him.

The blue eyes were dim, and the sweet mouth quivered, as she waved mechanically the huge fan above Cleopatra's head. Absorbed in her anxiety and gloomy foreboding, she did not see the heavy curtains that concealed the door, pushed slowly aside, nor hear the stealthy step of a man who



was creeping up behind her. Nearer and nearer he approached, until he was close beside her. Still she gazed into vacancy, still the fan moved slowly to and fro. Suddenly a hand was clapped over her mouth, preventing her from making any outcry, and a voice, that she recognized in spite of her alarm, whispered low in her ear:

“Not a word ! Not a sound ! Come with me.”

His hand was removed, and scarce knowing what she did, she arose cautiously and followed him to the door.

The queen stirred uneasily, but did not awaken.

When the curtain had fallen behind them, and they were alone in a small ante-room, Iras said, trembling with fear, not for herself, but for him:

“Pharon, what madness has brought you here ? And to-day in the garden ? Why do you thus risk your life ?”

“Risk my life ?” he replied, bitterly. “It is the last day I have to live. Let me, at least, make the most of it.”

“The last day you have to live ?” she repeated, with wide, staring eyes.

“Yes. You made me break my oath. To-night I keep it.”



She shrank back against the wall. As he saw her white face, he repented of his harshness.

"Nay, child, I would not pain you. Your motive was good. But, let me pass, once more would I look upon her face, and then——"

"You would go in there—to her?"

"Yes, let me pass. If it had not been for that hope, I should not have survived till now."

"But what would you do? Remember, she is the queen."

He smiled, sadly.

"Have no fear. I would not, I could not harm a hair of her head."

She moved aside, with a look that, if he had noticed it, might or might not have touched him; but he was thinking of the woman he loved, and what cared he for the woman who loved him?

As the curtain fell behind him, in an agony of doubt and fear, Iras sank to the ground, and crouching there, close to the door, listened, vainly endeavoring to still the beating of her heart.

Slowly and noiselessly Pharon crossed the mosaic floor, until he was close to the couch upon which Cleopatra lay. For a moment he held his breath as he gazed down upon her. How beautiful she was with one arm thrown up beneath



her head, and the long dark lashes shading the perfect oval of her cheek. What had he done that the gods should thus scourge him? To love a queen! It was as if one should love the moon. And yet, he remembered with a thrill that even as that fair luminary had once lent to Endymion, so had Cleopatra for one short hour been his. He had lived. For the last time he gazed upon that face with its fatal fascination, and now for the journey across the Styx and the darkness of Erebus.

Poor, vain fool! Too long has he lingered. For suddenly, without warning, the heavy eyelids are raised and those marvelous eyes are looking straight into his.

Spellbound, he could not move, and for a moment there was the stillness of death in the chamber. Then, with a low, muffled cry of unutterable horror, Cleopatra flung out her arms as if to shut out some horrible vision.

"You! You!" she gasped, with ashen lips. "What has forced you to quit the dark abyss?"

Pharon sank on his knees beside the couch, scarce knowing nor caring what he did.

"Queen!" he murmured.

With a bound, she shrank away from him,



"Horrible specter! Vile slave! Have you come at my last hour to avenge yourself?"

"To avenge myself? I love you."

With her eyes still fixed upon him, slowly she reached out her hand and touched him. Then, convinced that he was no specter, but flesh and blood, she burst into a fit of hysterical laughter. But, suddenly checking herself, she said, imperiously :

"Why are you here? Why did you not keep your oath?"

In few words he told her of his taking the poison in the temple, and of the antidote that had been administered to him, but without betraying his preserver's identity.<sup>1</sup>

The queen listened, but asked no questions.

A strange smile played about her mouth.

"So," she said, "I wished your death, and you love me still."

"Yes."

"Poor fool!"

"It was with no fear that I drank the poison. I was glad to die at your command. Ah! Have no fear that I shall fail in my word. To-day, the means shall be sure."

"See that it is," was the short, cruel response.



He arose to his feet.

"One word, oh, queen, before I go. At the command of another, who kept his word to me, and whom I cannot betray, it was I who fired to-day that arrow."

Cleopatra sprang to her feet.

"How, slave? It was to you, then, that I owe the torments of jealousy from which I have suffered!"

"Jealousy!" repeated Pharon, sadly. "Oh, queen, for him who has seen you but for a single day, there is no longer another woman, there is no longer another love. In vain some beauty tries to attract him and render him unfaithful; although near her, he is still yours. Before his eyes is incessantly your face, and he is blind to all else. His love is yours, and yours alone; to him you alone of all women in the world are beautiful, and as the Vestal Virgins nourish the sacred fire, he cherishes in his heart the memory of you."

These words were like balm to Cleopatra, wounded by Antony's silence.

"And yet," she said, musingly, "it is two days since a message has come from him. He has forgotten me."



“Does one forget you?” exclaimed Pharon, with suppressed passion. “You do not know the mightiness of your power. One can live without bread behind the walls of a besieged city, one can live without fire in the land of ice, one can live without water in the African desert, one can live without air in the furnaces of Vulcan, but one cannot live a day without thinking of you, without summoning up your face, without speaking your name twenty times, without longing to hear your voice, to breathe the air that you breathe. Oh! fear nothing! He loves you, and more now than ever. The one who has once loved you knows no peace away from you; he has but one hope, one dream, to live for you, and if he suffers through you, it is his joy—he hugs his suffering to his breast.”

To Cleopatra, this was no longer the slave whose death she had sought, that was speaking, but a prophet, an inspired prophet. Superstitious as she was, in spite of her great intelligence, she believed that the return of this man with these words of cheer was an omen of happiness in the future. Perhaps, too, she was recalled to a consciousness of her own power in holding the hearts of men. In all the long list of her love affairs



from the great Cæsar to this poor slave himself, it was always she who forsook, she was never forsaken.

A triumphant joy illumined her face, making it so gloriously lovely that Pharon involuntarily covered his eyes with his hands, as one does before the brilliancy of the sun.

"Ah!" she cried, exultantly. "He will return!"

"Trembling to ask for his chains once more. He loves you, he loves you still. You can believe me, for his torments are mine. Read in my heart and believe in his."

There was a smile upon the queen's face, a smile of conscious power. All her fears were for the moment gone. What folly to have believed that Antony could forget her.

"And now," said Pharon, "I go to fulfill my oath."

"No," said Cleopatra, gently, almost tenderly. "I absolve you. I bid you live."

The slave's face flushed scarlet. With a wild cry he fell on his knees before her. The thing that in his madness he had believed, had now come true. The queen had relented. It was not that he cared for life—what could life mean



for him?—but that she no longer wished his death.

Cleopatra drew from her finger a ring—a scarabæus set with priceless pearls—and, bending forward, placed it in his hand.

“Take this,” she said, softly, “as a memento that she whom they call cruel can be generous. Go, and never let me look upon your face again.”

Pharon arose to his feet, and, with one long glance, such a glance as a man doomed to die before morning would cast upon the setting sun, turned quickly and went out from her presence.

Through the ante-room he passed, never noticing the white-faced girl who stretched in dumb pain her trembling arms after him. What does he, whose eyes are raised to the splendor of the evening star, know of the modest violet he crushes beneath his careless feet?



## CHAPTER IX.

## FAREWELL.

From the ante-room Pharon turned abruptly into a narrow, winding hall, and, advancing a step or two, he studied closely for a moment the hieroglyphics upon the walls, and then pressed his finger upon one of the horns of a pictured semblance of the bull Apis. Slowly and noiselessly a panel slid aside, revealing a narrow, dark passage-way. The Greek closed the panel, and, feeling his way cautiously, proceeded until his hand struck a wall in front of him. He passed his hand over this wall, found the spring which opened another secret door, and finally emerged into a ruined aqueduct just outside the walls of the gardens of the palace. It was this way that he had escaped after firing the arrow, and this way that he had been able to penetrate into the palace without alarming the guards.

The sun was setting. The west was ablaze with



streaming crimson clouds that seemed like the flaming manes of the fleet steeds of Apollo, and lordly Memphis, with its temples and palaces, was bathed in a warm light.

Through the streets hurried Pharon in the direction of the Temple of Isis, where he was to meet Diomedes and give him an account of his mission. He held his mantle well before his face, as if to shield his eyes from the glare of the sunset, but in reality lest he should meet some one who would recognize him.

In the outer court of the temple he found Diomedes awaiting him.

The crafty courtier at once eagerly accosted him.

"Well," he asked, "did you succeed?"

The face of the young Greek grew hard, and in his eyes was a dangerous light.

"Yes," he answered. "I succeeded both on your behalf and my own. We are quits."

"Did Cleopatra read the message?"

"Yes. But I have an account to settle with you."

There was something so stern in the tone that Diomedes started.

"What do you mean?" he faltered,



"This! Why have you used me and my folly for your own vile ends? The bait offered me was well-chosen. What your ends may be, I know not, but it is for me now to prevent the success of your foul schemes."

"What! What are you going to do?" asked Diomedes, now thoroughly frightened.

"To kill you, as I would a venomous reptile!"

Diomedes' swarthy face turned livid. Possessed of rather uncommon intelligence and astuteness, as he undoubtedly was, he was physically a coward. With a sudden movement, he attempted to slip by his antagonist and reach the square beyond, but Pharon was too quick for him. In a vice-like grip, two muscular hands seized his throat. With protruding eyes and gasping breath, the poor wretch struggled and attempted to plead for mercy.

As a terrier shakes a rat, the Greek shook him violently to and fro.

Pharon's face was convulsed with anger, and he hissed in the ear of his victim:

"You would torture her, would you, with your vile insinuations? And I was your tool! But the slave is now the master, and for every pang you have caused you shall suffer tenfold. Rebel,



traitor to your country and your queen, your time has come, and you shall pay the penalty of your crime !”

The terror-stricken victim attempted to cry out, but the terrible pressure on his throat strangled his voice. His face was purple and distorted, and in a moment more he would undoubtedly have been crossing the dark stream in charge of the grim ferryman, had not a muscular arm intervened and wrenched away the Greek's hands from their clutch.

Serapion, in his priestly robes, stood between them.

“Sacrilegious vandals !” he cried. “Would you desecrate the temple of our Holy Mother ? Desist, I command you, in the name of Cleopatra, the Queen !”

Thus adjured, although his blood was roused to fever heat, Pharon made no resistance. With one contemptuous glance at Diomedes, who, half strangled and thoroughly terrified, leaned, shaking like a leaf, against the wall, he turned, and, followed by Serapion, who saw that the wily courtier had sustained no serious injury, made his way to the priests' cell.

“Pharon,” said Serapion, closing the door be-



hind them, "why have you left your place of concealment? Not only you, but myself and Iras would be in mortal danger if the queen should know that you are still alive."

"The queen does know," returned Pharon, shortly.

"What!" exclaimed the priest, with face as white as his beard. "The queen knows?"

"Yes, but fear nothing. Your secret is safe. She has no suspicion of who my preservers were. More—I am pardoned. My life is my own, to do with as I will. This very night I leave Memphis and Egypt forever. To you I owe thanks, although, perhaps, it would have been better had you left me to die."

"You return to Greece?" asked Serapion, with a sigh of relief which he could not repress.

"Yes."

At this moment the door was thrown suddenly back, and Iras hurriedly entered the room. Pharon, who happened to be just behind the door, was concealed from her.

The girl's eyes were red with weeping, and she was evidently in a high state of nervous excitement.

"Uncle," she exclaimed, "have you seen



Pharon? He has been at the palace, seen the queen, and I fear the worst."

"Yes," replied Serapion. "He is safe, and leaves for Greece to-night. The queen has pardoned him."

"Pardoned him!" she exclaimed, rapturously. "Now the gods be praised for that! For, had it been otherwise, two lives, not one, would have passed away before day-break."

And, unheeding the old man's warning glance, she proceeded hurriedly:

"I care not what happens now. He is safe. He, whom I love."

Serapion raised his hand to check her, but it was too late. As she spoke, she turned a little, and in so doing found herself face to face with Pharon.

For a moment they stood silently looking into each other's eyes. Perhaps, in that moment, they both realized what might have, nay, would have been, had Cleopatra never existed.

Iras was the first to speak.

"You have heard?" she said. "But what matters it? I prefer it so. Your life is saved. We shall never meet again, but perhaps afar off, in that beautiful land that was the birthplace of us



both, you will now and then give a thought to her who loved you here so hopelessly and so well. No! do not answer me. Do not speak. I know all that you would say. But once, before you go, kiss me—kiss me as you would were I dying.”

There were tears in his eyes as he bent forward and pressed his lips to hers. In another moment he was gone.

Iras stood motionless, until the sound of his retreating footsteps died away. Then, throwing herself into her uncle's arms, she burst into a passionate, uncontrollable fit of weeping.

Her dream of love was ended.



## CHAPTER X.

## THE MESSENGER OF WOE.

*Furens Quid Foemina !*

Day has followed day, week has followed week, month has followed month, and still no news from Antony. His letters, which at first were daily, have now ceased. No longer does the ibis appear, bearing beneath its wing the scroll of papyrus ; no longer does the cloud of dust upon the desert announce a horseman ; there is no messenger of any sort.

It is night. On the flat roof of the palace of Rameses, stretched upon a couch covered with the skins of wild beasts, lies Cleopatra, as, in spite of all entreaties, she has lain night after night, so that she might catch, from this point of vantage, the first sign of any approaching messenger. Beneath the skull cap, composed of a latticed crown of pearls, edged with large turquoises, escapes the heavy masses of her dark, silken



hair. About her hips is bound, sash-wise, a tiger skin, confining the folds of her robe of diaphanous black stuff, studded with jewels.

Seated on the roof at the foot of the couch, with her arms thrown across it, and her head resting upon her arms, sleeps Iras, worn out with fatigue. Very white looks the delicate face in the flickering light of the blazing torches, which are placed in each corner of the roof. At the head of the couch, stands Charmian, her eyes fixed wonderingly upon her royal mistress. Never before has Charmian seen the queen in any such condition as this, absolutely pining with love and longing. Her lovers, heretofore, have simply been to her the amusement of the moment, or an instrument by which she could further her ambition, her insatiable craving for power. Of each she had quickly tired, and of each she had quickly rid herself. But, now, it was far different, and Charmian was lost in wonder and bewilderment. The explanation was simple enough. Cleopatra's proud heart had at last met its master, and for the first and only time in her life she loved, loved with an unquenchable passion, which would know no satiety, and which death alone could end.



Upon the roof were two other persons, Serapion, who had been summoned by the queen to read the stars, and unfold to her what they disclosed of the future, and Kephren, the captain of the guard. The latter, fully armed, stood as sentinel near the flight of steps which led to the rooms below. There were peace and happiness in the faithful man's heart. For some inscrutable reason, which he neither knew nor cared to fathom, Cleopatra had been pleased to revoke her orders in regard to the discovery of the concealed archer, and Kephren was permitted once more to guard the person of his beloved sovereign.

The view from the roof of the palace was superb in its extent and somber grandeur.

The skies, lately flushed by the supreme splendor of the dying day, were now of a blue darkness from which shone out big bright stars, while low on the horizon was a faint, greenish-gold belt. The silver disk of the moon hung high in the heavens, bathing all in a mellow radiance, and flashing upon the sluggish, winding waters of the Nile. In all directions, stretched away a long, limitless plain of undulating sand, sparkling with a steely radiance in the moonlight, and recalling a sea of ice, or the surface of a lake softly stirred



by a summer's breeze. There was nothing to break the awe-inspiring immensity save the plateau on which rested the imposing vastness of the three pyramids, the tombs of Khufu, Khafra and Menkera, with their polished limestone sides covered with pictures and hieroglyphics that told the glorious history of the warrior kings. Keeping guard at the foot of the steps that led to the platform was the gigantic sphinx, the symbol of Horus, whose serene face bore the calm repose of the lonely land around it.

Motionless, as if a recumbent statue herself, lay the queen of this inscrutable land, her dark eyes fixed somberly upon the horizon.

Cleopatra's confidence, inspired by the words of the Greek slave, had been but short-lived. As day after day went by, with still no news of Antony, all her courage failed. She left all the cares of state to her ministers, and, attended only by her tire-women and Kephren, spent all her time in a moody watching for some sign from her recreant lover. Of Pharon she thought nothing save to regret the impulse of pity that had led her to give him his life, and to feel an occasional anger that she had neglected to demand the name of the one under whose inspiration he had fired



the arrow. Since the day of her interview with the Greek, Diomedes had not been seen, but the queen, tortured by anxiety as she was, gave but slight thought to his disappearance, and certainly did not connect it in any way with Pharon's partial revelation.

Her brain, her heart was filled with Antony. Her eyes saw nought of the landscape outspread before them, but, as in a mirage, there seemed to rise before her a vision of the man who had grown to be all the world to her, whom she loved with all the ardor of her fiery nature. The love she gave him was not all virgin, true, it had in it an alloy of baser metal, but what it lacked in purity, it atoned for by its strength and unwavering constancy. She was his and his alone, heart, body, and soul. She fancied she saw once more Antony's handsome face, with its deep, passion-fraught eyes looking into hers as they had done so often during those days of wild revelry after she had borne him away, a willing prisoner, from Tarsus. She fancied that he stood there before her with arms outstretched ready to clasp her in close embrace.

Overpowered by the picture which her imagination had conjured up, she half started from the



couch, and wildly flinging out her white arms toward the phantom figure, she cried, in loud, thrilling tones:

“Antony! Antony!”

The cry swept over the flat expanse of sand, which returned no echo; the only echo was in the lonely queen's heart.

Startled, Iras awoke and raised her head, and Charmian, approaching nearer, knelt down beside the queen.

“Madame! Royal mistress!” she said, soothingly.

At the words, the queen's face lost its strained expression, and, with a long, shuddering sigh, she sank back upon the couch. Then, as she caught sight of the white-robed figure of Serapion, who was standing a short distance away, she raised herself eagerly upon one elbow, and motioned the priest to approach.

For an instant she eyed him with a peculiar expression, half scorn, half reverence. She had summoned him to her presence to hear what predictions he could make in regard to Antony's speedy return. Cleopatra's intelligence was too keen for her at ordinary times to thoroughly trust in the auguries and omens in which the people of



that age had such implicit confidence, but still she was not without a vain of superstition, and, in this hour of doubt and suspicion, she was ready to seize upon anything that could give even an instant's hope to her troubled heart.

"Holy priest of our Holy Mother," she said, "speak! What says Isis as to the future?"

At these words, although he had been expecting them, the priest trembled. His prophecies, in regard to Antony, had failed so often, that he did not dare to again risk incurring Cleopatra's displeasure.

"To the Great Queen only the truth must be spoken," he replied; "the oracle of Isis is strangely silent."

The queen made an impatient movement.

"There are other methods of divination besides consulting the oracles of the gods," she said. "The alites, for instance. What do the flight of the birds portend?"

"Great Queen," replied Serapion, more and more troubled, "your summons came too late for that. Only in the light of the day can the significance of the noise and flight of winged creatures be interpreted."

Cleopatra's brow grew dark.



"At all events," she said, shortly, "it is the time to consult those bright-eyed messengers above. Look into the heavens and tell me what your art reads there. And look to it," she added, significantly, "that this time your augury proves true."

Serapion could evade the question no longer. With a stifled sigh, he turned his eyes upon the stars. Whether the interpreters of signs in those days believed in their own predictions or not is a mooted question. It is said that when two augurs chanced to meet they would exchange a smile. The people, however, believed in them implicitly, and no undertaking of any importance was put into operation without consulting and blindly following the oracles.

After a long scrutiny of the starry heavens, Serapion spoke:

"Yes, the stars, that never lie, tell me that, even now, a message is on its way from the noble triumvir, but whether with good or evil tidings is not revealed. The Great Queen will not have long to wait."

"'Tis well," said Cleopatra, shortly. "Return to-morrow, and see that the alites are not again forgotten."



Serapion crossed his arms upon his breast in token of reverence and submission, and with downcast eyes passed Kephren, and, slowly descending the stairs, soon vanished from sight.

Cleopatra threw herself wearily back upon the couch and fixed her eyes upon the glittering stars. Oh! would that their predictions might come true! Anything was better than this suspense. What did this strange silence portend? What stupid pride, what inconceivable folly had prompted her to send him to Italy? And for what? For his own glory, to receive the plaudits of the Romans. Fool, fool that she had been! Now, what cared she for ambition? She would give half her kingdom to be able to call this truant bird back again and imprison him once more in his gilded cage.

But, while the queen is lost in contemplation of the heavens, and Iras and Charmian, withdrawn to a little distance, are talking low together, a puff of dust arises upon the horizon. For once, the stars have spoken true. A messenger of weal or woe is on his way, and the end of his journey is close at hand. The queen's long, weary vigil will soon be over, and the truth as to Antony's mysterious silence be known.



Faster and faster gallops the good horse, closer and closer approaches the messenger. The palace of Rameses is in sight, but none upon the roof has as yet perceived him.

Suddenly the clatter of hoofs rings faintly out upon the air.

With a bound, the queen leaps to her feet, and, followed by Charmian and Iras, rushes to the edge of the parapet.

"Look! Charmian! See Iras!" she cried, exultantly. "A horseman! A horseman! The gods be praised! The messenger at last!"

Breathlessly, they watched the onward gallop of the horse until he was close at hand. Then Cleopatra cried to the captain of the guard, who had remained at his station:

"Go! Kephren! Go! Meet him! Bring him at once into my presence!"

The horseman had galloped around to the other side of the palace, where the courtyard was, and was lost to view.

In feverish excitement, the queen swept to and fro upon the roof, like a caged lioness hungry for the food which had been long delayed, until the sound of hurried footsteps was heard upon the stone steps of the staircase. Then she stopped



short, and with both hands pressed to her wildly-beating heart, awaited the appearance of the messenger.

In another moment, Kephren issued from below, followed by a man naked, save for the breech-cloth about his loins, and covered with the dust of travel.

With a gesture, Kephren indicated the queen, and Antony's messenger, for such indeed he was, advanced hurriedly, and prostrated himself at her feet.

"Rise, rise, my friend," exclaimed Cleopatra, with a catch in her voice that betrayed the terrible excitement she was laboring under. "You come from him? From Antony?"

The man arose to his feet, and stood a pace or two from her. Either from the weariness of his journey, or from some emotion, he was trembling from head to foot.

"Hail, royal Egypt!" he began. "Hail——"

"Answer my question!" interrupted the queen, imperiously. "This is no time for idle ceremony. You come from Antony?"

"Yes, Great Queen," replied the messenger, with downcast eyes.

Suddenly, as she looked upon his somber vis-



age, a great fear sprang up in the queen's heart. Her cheeks paled, and, in a hollow whisper, she asked, tremulously :

"What means this mournful countenance? Is —is Antony—dead?"

"No, he lives—is well."

With a wild cry of joy, she stripped her fingers of their blazing jewels, and showered them upon the messenger.

"Here! Take this! And this! And this! I could give thee all the jewels of the Orient for news like this! Praised be Isis! He lives! He lives! And victorious?"

"Yes, the sea has been delivered from the pirates. The fleet of Sextus Pompey has been captured."

Again fell a shower of glittering jewels; bracelets and necklaces this time fell at the feet of the messenger, while Cleopatra's face flushed and her breast heaved with triumphant joy.

But the messenger did not stoop to pick up the rewards thus lavishly flung to him. He seemed embarrassed and wofully ill at ease.

"But——" he said, at last, and then hesitated, as if fearful to proceed.

Instantly the queen's face changed.



"But——" she faltered. "But—oh! what horror lies behind that but!"

The messenger was silent.

"By Isis!" continued Cleopatra, a prey to mingled fear and anger. "This is too much. Speak, slave! You have said Antony is alive!"

The messenger summoned up all his courage, and with an evident effort, replied:

"He is alive, yes. He is not dead to the world, but he is dead to Cleopatra."

The queen flung up her head with a dangerous glitter in her eye.

"Go on!"

The command was so slow and quiet that it deceived the messenger, and it was with more confidence that he now spoke.

"Octavius and Antony are reconciled, and, to cement the peace of the world, Antony has married Octavia."

For an instant the queen stood as if stiffened into marble. Her cheeks and lips were the color of ashes; the only sign of life was in her eyes, which gleamed and glowed like two coals of living fire. Then, suddenly, with a fierce, wild cry, like that of the tigress, as she is about to rend her prey, she sprang savagely upon the unfortunate



messenger and struck him with both hands full in the face.

The man, in an agony of terror, fell prostrate at her feet.

Raising her foot, in its golden sandal, she spurned him from her, as if he had been some venomous beast. Then, looking down upon him, in a fury of unbridled passion, she hissed through her set teeth, the words cutting the air like so many stings of a whip-lash :

“Return whence you came, messenger of hell, and bear my curses to him!”

The messenger crawled away, only too glad to escape with his life.

“Married!” continued Cleopatra, as if speaking to herself, her beautiful features distorted with grief and rage. “Married! He is married! He who swore by my eyes, by my lips, never to know other kisses than mine! Married! Oh! execrable treason! By Oms, the dog of hell! I should have guessed it! From his lack of tears at Fulvia’s death I should have known what to expect—have known that once away from me, he would forget me! Married! To that woman! Cæsar’s sister! He was celebrating his marriage feast, while I was languishing in solitude, living on the



hope of seeing him again, ready to give my scepter for one hour of him! Poor fool that I was, wrapped in the memory of passed joys, asking myself: 'Where is he? Why does he delay?' Imagining that his thoughts were all of me, that he would marry me before assembled Rome, bear me away with him, and repeat to me again the passionate words that have proved my ruin, while I wept with love in his arms! Oh! Coward! Coward! Coward!"

And, in a paroxysm of rage and despair, the unhappy queen flung herself upon the couch, and rolled and sobbed there with the ferocity of a wild-cat.

With white faces, Charmian and Iras looked on, not daring to speak a word of sympathy or comfort.

Gradually the queen grew calmer, the paroxysm abated, the sobs and cries died away, and finally she raised her tear-stained face from where it had been buried in a tiger-skin. Her head-dress had fallen off, and her beautiful hair hung in dishevelled masses about her shoulders. In her hopeless anguish she might have served as a model for Niobe. With the pleading gesture of a tired child, she stretched out her arms to her



women. In a moment they were kneeling at her side.

"Good girls! Good girls!" she murmured.

"Alas, dear mistress, calm yourself," whispered Charmian, soothingly, while Iras pressed her lips to the queen's hand.

"Cæsar's sister!" she moaned. "Yes, the mystery is explained. A perfidious conquest over—a passion chilled! How true he has remained to his nature—proud and lowly, player, hero, and buffoon! And through it all, a dupe, ever a dupe! Bewailing Cæsar, and at the same time flattering his murderers! Oh, I know him!"

And, carried away again by her rage, she flung aside the hands of Charmian and Iras, and, springing to her feet, proceeded with passionate volubility:

"Oh! I know him! This is the man who robbed the house of great Pompey at Rome; slew Cicero most vilely, mean and dastardly in resentment! Death for a speech! That tongue of glorious truth silenced forever! Oh! shame! shame! And yet I loved him! Loved him! Who shall dare say it? Loved him as I loved Cæsar! Never! Who dares say it shall die?"

With a threatening air, she swept a glance



about, as if seeking some one who would dare assert it.

“What! He has fled from me! He has dared to love another! Can it be true? Mad and insolent! Quit me—prefer the Roman! Who is this woman who dares to vie with me in power and pride? Is she beautiful or ugly? She must be beautiful! Oh! I would like to see her! What frightful torment not to have an image against which to direct one's hatred, to strike in the air and curse at hazard. Ah! that messenger! he must have seen Octavia! Bring him, Kephren! He will tell me what I want to know. Bring him before me!”



## CHAPTER XI.

## BENEATH THE IBIS' WING.

It was with great difficulty that Kephren could persuade the terror-stricken messenger to appear again before the queen, and it was only by dint of threats that he finally succeeded in doing so.

When the messenger emerged upon the roof he was somewhat reassured, however, by the exceeding graciousness of Cleopatra's reception. She had apparently quite recovered her self-possession, and, in the sweetest of tones, she apologized for the rough treatment to which she had subjected him.

"You were innocent," she said, "and I should not have confounded the master with his mouth-piece. Approach!"

Still trembling, the messenger obeyed. Cleopatra threw herself nonchantly upon the couch, and asked, with a smile:

"What is your name?"



"Lucullus."

"Lucullus? Tell me, Lucullus, do you know Octavius?"

"Yes, queen."

"And his sister, Octavia?"

The messenger hesitated a moment. Was this a trap that was being laid for him?

"Answer," repeated Cleopatra. "Do you know Octavia?"

"I do not know her, queen."

"Have you ever seen her?"

"I saw her once, at the festival of Juno."

"Is she beautiful?"

As the messenger was about to answer, he saw Charmian, who was standing behind the queen, make a sign to him to answer in the negative.

"No, madam, she is white and lank."

The queen smiled.

"Young?"

"No. At least she looks not so."

"As tall as I?"

"Oh, not near so tall."

"The color of her hair?"

"Brown."

"Her eyes?"

"Small, and pale in hue."



Cleopatra clapped her hands and laughed aloud with fiendish glee.

"Do you hear, Charmian? A sickly, ugly dwarf! And does she hope to vie with me? Iras, pick up those baubles, and give them to this faithful messenger. Good Lucullus, we will make amends for our hasty action. You can go."

But after the messenger had departed, Cleopatra's face clouded over again. Had he spoken the truth? Or rather, fearing her anger, had he not framed his answers to please her? She must know the truth. She would know. But how? How, save by seeing with her own eyes, and judging for herself. Yes, she would go to Rome, and in spite of all danger confront her faithless lover and his new-made wife. And at once! Not a moment should be lost.

"Kephren!"

The captain of the guard approached, and bent his knee.

"Kephren, can I trust you?"

"May the thunderbolt strike and the lightning blast me when I am false to thee, Great Queen," was the fervent answer.

Yes, she knew she could trust him. She had tried him often, and never found him wanting.



"Listen, then, to my commands, and carry them out to the letter. To-night, good Kephren, you, Iras, and myself set sail for Rome."

A cry of horrified amazement broke simultaneously from the lips of the captain of the guard and the two women. Charmian started forward and was about to speak, but, with an imperious gesture, Cleopatra commanded silence.

"Kephren," she continued, with calm decision, "send at once a trusted messenger to the port to inquire what vessel can take us on board and weigh anchor at once. Do not mention me. I shall pass as a Greek slave, like Iras here, and we will all three depart, protected by the gods and the silence and darkness of the night."

When Kephren had departed, Charmian threw herself on her knees beside the queen in an attitude of supplication.

"Oh, beloved queen!" she exclaimed, "do not, do not, I implore, depart in this way without a guard, without friends, without ships, without an army! What! would you confide yourself to strange gods? Think of the perils and the dangers you must undergo!"

Cleopatra smiled scornfully, but, at the same



time, she laid her hand indulgently on Charmian's head.

"I have already incurred dangers graver yet than these you fear for me. Have you forgotten, Charmian? Do you not remember the day that Apollodorus took me, on a boat, alone with him, to the house of Cæsar, and carried me on his back wrapped in a carpet? Ah, it was stifling! I could scarcely breathe. 'What do you bring me there?' 'General, it is the queen. A richer present has never been made you.' Cæsar began to laugh, and so did I. I was fifteen then. No, Charmian, no," she continued, her eyes flashing with angry determination. "The greatest danger for me is this outrage to which I have been subjected to-day, and which threatens to destroy all that I have striven for. At all costs, I must find Mark Antony once more, or great Egypt and I together will perish from his desertion. Say no more. My plans are irrevocably formed. Give me your tablets and stylet. I wish to write down my orders."

Sadly and without a word, Charmian obeyed. She knew, from bitter experience, how useless it was to oppose the haughty will of the queen. But it was with direful forebodings that she watched her mistress rapidly writing.



"What I have inscribed here," said Cleopatra, at last, handing back the tablets, "must be faithfully followed out each day, as if they were orders emanating from the moment. Our neighbors are at peace with us, and the people are tranquil. I can, without imprudence, abandon the city. But it must be believed that I am here, in this palace. When the priests come to-morrow, you yourself receive them. Tell them that I am ill to death, that fever is consuming me, that I detest the sight of all my subjects, that my reason is wandering. Strike your breast, and pretend to weep."

"It will be sincere, alas!" said Charmian, sadly. "If you leave me, I shall have plenty of real tears."

"You will reign in my place, Charmian," continued Cleopatra, allowing the interruption to pass unnoticed. "No one will ever believe that I would depart without you. No, you will remain; that is the best means to conceal my absence."

But Charmian was determined to be heard. A woman of a hard, cold, skeptical nature, as far as all others were concerned, she loved the queen devotedly, and, if words of hers could do aught to prevent this mad undertaking, she was determined to speak them, even if by so doing she incurred Cleopatra's anger.



So she said, firmly :

"Queen, I cannot remain. I must share your danger."

Cleopatra stamped her foot, angrily.

"Say no more !" she said, haughtily. "You will remain. I wish it."

Charmian recognized the futility of any further discussion on this point, but she was about to combat still further Cleopatra's resolution to take this journey to Rome, when Kephren returned from his mission and interrupted the words that were on her lips.

"Well," cried Cleopatra, eagerly turning toward him. "What news ?"

"The Antoniad is ready, and can sail at once."

"The Antoniad ! Ah, that name is of good omen. Come, Iras, let us hasten to make our preparations. We must start before daylight."

But once more Charmian bravely sought to interfere.

"What !" she exclaimed. "For the love of a Roman, would you immolate your kingdom ?"

With a fiery exclamation, Cleopatra turned upon her, but something in the woman's look recalled to her all her lifelong love and devotion, and she smothered the anger that was ready to



burst forth in unmeasured denunciation of Charmian's obstinate opposition to her royal will.

"The love of a Roman!" she repeated. "Ah, Egypt without him is no more than a vain phantom. Antony alone can restore to this sad country the splendor of its former days."

As she spoke, she turned to go, but her footsteps were arrested by a sudden exclamation from Kephren, who at the same time pointed upward to the skies. Cleopatra raised her eyes in the direction of the gesture. Ha! what was that silvery flash against the darkness of the heavens? The wings of an ibis, bearing, perhaps, some further message from Antony. But in close pursuit of the sacred bird was an enormous eagle. Already it rose in the air to pounce upon its prey.

"Quick, Kephren, quick!" screamed Cleopatra. "Fire upon that eagle. Quick, or it will be too late!"

"But if I kill the ibis!" exclaimed Kephren.

"No matter. Fire—fire, I tell you! It is at my command."

To kill an ibis was an unforgiveable sin. But not for one instant did Kephren hesitate. He would have boldly faced all the terrors of the infernal regions at the command of Egypt's Queen.



Like a flash, he brought his bow into position and sent an arrow whizzing into the clear ether. As fate would have it, however, his fears were realized. The eagle was unhurt, and with one startled cry abandoned its prey and sailed proudly away into the distance. The shaft had struck the ibis squarely in the breast, and, like a falling star, it flashed through the air and struck heavily upon the roof just within the parapet.

For a moment all were stricken with horror. Even Cleopatra shuddered at the enormity of the offense committed. Then, without a word, she motioned Kephren to bring her the bird.

With white face the captain of the guard obeyed. Tenderly the queen received the sacred bird, its silvery plumage all dabbled in blood, and its bright eyes already dimmed with the film of death.

Yes, beneath one of its wings was fastened a tiny roll of papyrus. With trembling hands Cleopatra unloosed it; then laying the ill-fated ibis reverently upon the couch, she hastened past Charmian and Iras, who, still horrified at the sacrilege, were close clasped in one another's arms, and, approaching one of the blazing torches, unrolled the parchment.



In the flickering light she read these words :

“Arm your fleet of war and sail at once for  
Actium. ANTONY.”

The parchment fell fluttering from her nerveless fingers. What could be the meaning of this strange summons? What! Antony demanded the aid of Egypt! Against whom, if not against Octavius? Yes, since sending the messenger to announce his reconciliation with Octavius and his marriage to Octavia, he had quarrelled with the brother, and, therefore, undoubtedly repudiated the sister. Under what other circumstances would he have dared appeal to Egypt's Queen, whom he had so foully wronged?

Cleopatra's beautiful face was aglow with anticipated triumph as she returned to where Kephren and the two women stood, still under the spell of the terror which had seized them on account of the sacrilege that had been committed.

“What is done, is done,” she said, noticing their downcast faces, “and cannot be recalled. It was the will of the gods, and the gods will pardon. Charmian, give the ibis to Phraor, the chief of the royal embalmers. Tell him to spare neither perfumes nor spices, and to adorn the body with the richest of ornaments. I wish that the faithful



messenger who has given his life for me should repose one day by my side. The message," she continued, with a rapid change of tone, "requests me to repair at once to Actium with ships of war. He has, therefore, quitted Rome and is about to engage in battle. With Octavius, probably. Ah, that is what I must know, and without delay."

"Then," said Charmian, quickly, "you will go with the fleet?"

"No, my first plans shall be carried out. Kephren, Iras, and I will proceed to-night on the Antoniad, only for Actium, not for Rome. The fleet can follow after. Do as I have bidden you. Give out that I am ill, and let Egypt believe me still in Memphis. Kephren, sound the alarm—call together the sailors, and send a messenger to order the ships at Alexandria to proceed to Actium."

"But," said Charmian, imploringly, "may not this be a plot to bring you into the power of the Romans. At least, think of your life——"

With flashing eyes and cheeks crimsoned with excitement, the queen drew her superb figure up to its full height. Like some warrior goddess she looked as she stood there, the silver radiance of the moon lighting up her rare loveliness.



“Charmian, I wish to see that woman!” she exclaimed, in tones that vibrated with intense passion. “A single look, a single one, will tell me the extent of her power. Virtues, they say, are so many charms. To fight with her, I must know, at least, the weapons she possesses. The struggle shall be between us two, and before him! Am I, then, an object to inspire satiety and disgust? A sad Ariadne, a pale matron, an ugly Sappho, to be thrown aside and abandoned? Have my flatterers, perchance, lauded too highly my beauty? I am a queen. Of what use to me is my royalty, the power and splendor of my crown, if I cannot please this man whom I love? Why, if the beauty of that pale Roman pleases him, if her will is his law, then the lowest scullion in my kitchens is more royal than I. I am a queen, I am a daughter of the Ptolemies, I love—I deign to love, and I am not loved! And this man goes to seek an innocent, conjugal happiness, after having carelessly cast to me a few days of his life! His love for her is serious, his love for me a pastime. Why should he remain faithful to Cleopatra? Cleopatra was but his mistress. Octavia is his wife. So, where virtue reigns, my influence expires? Antony, this trick of yours will cost



you an empire. Come, let us go! I know not what your summons means. I care not. I shall arrive too late to change anything, but I shall arrive in ample time for vengeance!"

Like the incarnation of impending fate, she swept rapidly across the roof, until she reached the stone pillars, which flanked on either side the opening of the staircase. Then, suddenly, as if by magic, the offended majesty of the outraged queen disappeared and the heartbreak of the forsaken woman asserted itself.

The lines about her mouth softened and her eyes filled with tears. She turned, and with a mighty, unconquerable longing, stretched out her arms in the direction of Actium.

"Oh, Antony, Antony! I could not hate thee so bitterly did I not love thee so well!"



## CHAPTER XII.

## IN THE ETERNAL CITY.

The news brought by the messenger was only too true. Antony, in spite of all his vows and protestations to Cleopatra, had married his rival's sister, Octavia. On his arrival in Rome, he had been received with acclamations of joy by both soldiers and populace.

With Pompey threatening them by sea, Antony was the man they looked to as their leader. Octavius was not a man to inspire personal devotion; he was essentially a statesman, cool and cautious, while Antony was a military chief, fiery and impetuous. Moreover, the latter was no general of inaction; he was always to be found in the midst of the fray, inspiring and urging on his soldiers by acts of personal daring. He was not only their commander, but their companion, fighting by their side. It is not strange, therefore, that his captains and his soldiers adored him and were ready to fight for him to the last gasp.



After the complete route of Pompey, Antony's popularity was greatly increased, and Octavius became seriously alarmed. He had always feared Antony, and now he feared him more than ever. As for Lepidus, the third triumvir, he was no more than a pack-horse. His weakness of character and lack both of military talents and statesmanship made him far inferior to his two colleagues. No, Lepidus was a nonentity, and Octavius paid but little attention to him. Antony was the sole man that might stand in the way of Cæsar's ambitions, and Antony was the one to be propitiated, if possible.

In his boundless ambition, Octavius had resolved to be the master of Rome and so of the world. He realized that the time had not yet come to assume sole control of Rome, which he afterward so brilliantly did, but he never once lost sight of his aim and the diplomatic game he was playing. How to bind Antony to him and prevent him from balking his plans was the question, and, after much cogitation, he hit upon a project which appeared to solve the difficulty.

Octavius Cæsar had an only sister, Octavia, a woman of great personal attractions and of unusual mental accomplishments. Why not marry



her to Antony? This would make the interests of the two men identical, and ratify and confirm the reconciliation that had taken place between them.

Octavius, therefore, proposed the match. To obtain his sister's consent was no difficult matter. She was gentle and affectionate and a lover of peace and harmony; moreover Antony's superior talents and graces of person had already made an impression upon her heart.

With Antony, however, it was a very different matter. His whole heart was with Cleopatra, and he was longing for the time to come when he could return to her. At first, he absolutely declined to listen to the proposition. But the people of Rome and the leaders were extremely anxious that the arrangement should be consummated, knowing as they did that the peace of the world depended upon the relations that existed between these two men, and Antony gradually allowed himself to be won over. It was Ventidius, his old friend and comrade in arms, and the man of all others for whom he had perhaps the greatest affection and veneration, who finally wrung from him a reluctant consent.

"This unmanly love for the Queen of Egypt



means war," Ventidius said to him, when he urged as a reason for refusing the proffered alliance that it would be treachery to Cleopatra. "Yes, war!"

"No! It would mean war if this marriage took place," retorted Antony. "At present, Egypt is ours, she is our ally. I control her wheat, her soldiers, her immense fleet of war. I have more than a hundred vessels at anchor in her ports. Let me go there. Here I am a slave. Egypt is my country. There I am my own master, there at least I can breathe freely. There I can live as I please, and no one presumes to dictate to me. It is undoubtedly a fine thing to be a Roman, but not in Rome. Here, one is forced to act a part, and there is always some carper who cries shame upon your life. Gayety and brilliancy are proscribed as crimes, and one is forced to be a hypocrite if he desires the Romans' esteem."

"You surely have that."

"Of the army, yes, but not of the fickle populace. If you are generous and scatter gold broadcast there is a hue and outcry, and so likewise if you hoard your money. My tastes that you call capricious were really wise measures. To conquer the East I adopted its customs. No! This mar-



riage horrifies me. I could not live in the coldness of a home with Octavia. Then, this Forum is full of unpleasant memories; it was there that I suffered that deadly insult; it was there that Cicero attacked me when I was defenseless. Rome, for me, means him. I see him everywhere, and in all the echoes, I hear only his voice."

"Did not his death—and what a death—avenge you?"

"Does death ever avenge a mortal injury? But let us talk no more of him! Away from Rome, I love her and my sword is ever ready for her defense. But to live here is like living beneath a pall."

"Oh! vain excuses behind which you seek to take refuge!" exclaimed Ventidius, his hot temper momentarily getting the better of him. "What you miss here are your nights of orgies, the delights of your culpable love!"

"Well, yes," retorted Antony, no less hotly. "Cleopatra has my every thought. No longer seek to detain me. I am no more a soldier, no more a Roman. I am a miserable man, whom a mad love torments—a lover pitilessly separated from his mistress. I hear her cries! I divine



from here her despair! I wish to console her. I wish—I wish to see her!”

Ventidius was silent. His anger, quickly aroused, was quickly allayed. He saw that he had made a mistake, and he sought to atone for it.

“Antony,” he said, very earnestly, after a long pause, “if it were a question of yourself, of your interests alone, of your happiness, in short, I would resign myself to see your valor lulled to sleep, your name extinct. But it is the fatal love of a queen who is our natural enemy. It means the Roman Empire destroyed, ruined, lost forever! What matters, in such a case, her tears and cries? General your foolish pity dishonors you. And, in the name of our old friendship, in the name of your country, in the name of Rome, who will judge you, I implore you to abandon Egypt and wed Octavia.”

“It seems to me,” said Antony, sullenly, “that Octavius has his friends, and that they serve him well.”

“Do you think that?” cried Ventidius. “Ah! that speech was unworthy of you. Pompey is dead. Lepidus is in Africa. Without you, Cæsar would have sole sway. But he offers to give you his sister, his well-beloved sister, and,



for the sake of your old comrades, accept. Are you then insensible to the love of Octavia? She is young, she is beautiful——”

“She is Cæsar’s sister,” said Antony, slowly, but in a less obstinate tone than he had used heretofore.

Ventidius saw this, and hastened to say:

“Octavius dreams of a crown. The less worthy he is, the more he wishes, the more he dares. His genius is doubtful, and the name of Cæsar is a heavy burden to carry. I tell you, old friend, that you alone can curb his ambition, defend our rights and preserve us from the shameful yoke of a king. You alone can maintain the dignity and freedom of Rome. Roman, sacrifice yourself! Roman, preserve your country! Not I alone, but the whole civilized world demands this of you!”

Antony was deeply moved, and at last, as has been said, agreed to accept Octavia as a wife.

The marriage took place. Antony felt but little affection for his bride, beautiful and gentle as she was, but he could not but respect her for her virtues, and for a time she exercised a most salutary influence over him. But it was not possible for any woman long to hold a man who remem-



bered the seductive graces of the Egyptian Queen. Soon Antony grew restive under the restraint of a domestic life, the longing to see once more the face of the woman he adored, took complete possession of him, and he sought for some excuse to break his bonds.

The opportunity was not slow in presenting itself.

After the defeat of Sextus Pompey, a new division of the Roman world was arranged, Antony taking the East and Octavius the West, while Lepidus had to put up with Africa. But a dispute now arose over the partition of Sicily, of which Octavius claimed the whole. Antony at once seized upon this as an excuse for a rupture. A violent quarrel ensued, and before a reconciliation could be effected, Antony hurriedly left Rome, knowing full well what would be the consequences of his action, but caring little, absorbed as he was in his passionate desire to see Cleopatra once more. He proceeded to Actium, on the west coast of Greece, and commanded the officers and soldiers of his army to join him there. From Actium also he sent the message to Egypt.

Octavius was exceedingly enraged at Antony's action, and his old feelings of hostility broke



forth anew, heightened, as they were, by the abandonment of his sister, to whom he was sincerely attached. He ordered Octavia to leave Antony's house and come to him, but she refused, declaring that the house of her husband, whatever that husband might be guilty of, was the place where it was her duty to remain.

With remarkable self-abnegation, the noble woman sought to repair the breach that had been made between her husband and her brother.

She procured an interview with Octavius, and pleaded her husband's cause with all the courage and energy she could command. She entreated her brother to delay and not take such measures as would make her the most miserable of women. Of the two most powerful men in the world, she was the wife of one and the sister of the other. If violent counsels were to be listened to and war were to ensue, she would be the one to suffer the most deeply. For, whichever side conquered, she would be forced to grieve.

Octavius, cool and calculating as he was, did not remain insensible to his sister's distress. But his resentment at Antony's baseness, and his fear of him as the chief obstacle in the way of his own ambitious designs, remained as keen as ever.



"This pretended anger of Antony's," he said, "is but an excuse. He goes to rejoin Cleopatra. My sister, do not allow your pride to come between us. I am your best friend; tell me the truth. Antony has betrayed us, and forsaken us. You know it as well as I."

"Even if that be true," replied Octavia, sadly but firmly, "I forgive him."

"But I cannot forgive him so easily. All Rome shall know that my sister——"

"Oh! I beseech you, no!" interrupted Octavia, with an imploring gesture. "Whatever your anger may be, never speak my name. Do whatever else you like! Make your common friends his enemies, tell them that it is your desire to reign alone over the empire, and to crush your rival, but do not speak to them of the wrongs I have suffered or have still to suffer at his hands. Do not speak to them of the sorrows of my life. Of what importance to the Romans are the tears of Octavia? Break the bond that has united you, if such is your desire, but leave me out of your quarrel. Be cruel, but permit me to be generous. I love Antony, and I wish the common herd to believe me happy as his wife. I



love him, and no one has the right to accuse him, when I do not complain."

"But," persisted Octavius, "he has insulted you—and me."

"I do not feel the insult. No! Antony's great virtue is his courage. And the love of so great a hero can well be purchased at the price of a few salt tears. What matters Cleopatra or any other woman? He can only love them in his hours of intoxication. It is I whom he cherishes when his reason asserts itself, I whom he seeks by his own fireside, I to whom he promises the future of his life. It is I whom he respects, and it is I who am the one to be envied. I alone can follow him and care for him, without blushing and without fear of witnesses. I alone, the sharer of his great renown, have the right to announce his successes to the army, to send to the senate his glorious flags and to offer in his name a sacrifice to the gods. You see, my brother, mine is the better part."

And a smile of pride illumined for a moment the face of the injured wife, who thus sought to console herself for her slighted charms.

Octavius also smiled, but it was a smile of exceeding bitterness.



"And yet," he said, slowly, "he has left you to join the queen. You see that he deceives you."

Octavia's face became sad again.

"He will write to me, soon," she murmured.

"He will not write to you!" retorted Octavius, violently. "I know all his projects, his every step. He has gone to seek Cleopatra again; that is no longer a mystery. They will arm against me all the kings of the Orient. In spite of us, Antony is assured of the aid of those whom he has conquered; they will all fight for him. The queen will have as allies her powerful neighbors; Adallas, King of Thrace, Herod of Judæa, Amyntas and Polemon, the King of the Medes, the King of Lybia, the King of Arabia, and twenty others, will furnish her soldiers and gold. And that is not all. Antony dares to accuse your brother. He complains loudly that the division of empire was an arbitrary one. I conquered Sicily, and yet he demands half of it. He declares that I deposed Lepidus, wrongfully and mercilessly, that I have confiscated all his property to my own use, and that I have ships of his which I will not give up. And every day I hear of some fresh insult that his lips have uttered. All this proves to me that Antony is



weary of peace. He contemplates war. So be it. He will not find me unprepared!"

At these words, Octavia threw herself on her knees beside her brother's chair, seized his hand, and raising her tearful eyes to his, said in a trembling voice :

"Between you both, you will immolate me on the altar of your barbarous pride. Brother, hear my prayer. Before moving against Antony, before judging him, wait, wait a little, Octavius, if you love me. Antony is my husband, and our griefs are the same. The blows you aim at him will fall upon me. Can you do him any harm that I shall not feel? What will become of me in the midst of your bloody conflicts? How will the gods comprehend my ever-varying prayers? If I go to implore their aid in your favor, alas! To pray for you is to pray against him. Whatever be the result, whatever arms are crowned with the laurels of victory, there is no hope for me, only a choice between tears and tears."

"Evil be to him," cried Octavius, throwing his arm about her, "who causes tears to my sister, the only one that I love and honor!"

And these were not idle words. Selfish and



cold to all others, Octavius Cæsar really loved his gentle sister.

“Brother,” said Octavia, caressingly, “let me go to Actium. Nay, do not decide hastily. Let me try what I can do to repair this dreadful breach. Surely, my tears, my prayers will avail with him. For the sake of my happiness, brother, let me go.”

Octavius reflected for a moment, and then he said, slowly:

“Very well, you shall go. But, not alone. I will accompany you, with my legions at my back.”

Octavia’s cheeks blanched, and she uttered a cry of alarm.

“Nay, fear not,” continued Octavius. “I grant your request, but you shall go as befits Cæsar’s sister. I will wait, since you ask it. Your injuries are greater than mine, and I yield to your gentle pleadings. See Antony. Effect what you can. If he refuses to listen to you, it is only one outrage the more. The more he injures me, the stronger is my position. Rome will recognize that. But, if he rejects your mediation, then it is civil war! Try, if you will, however, and, for your sake, may the gods be propitious!”



With a cry of gratitude Octavia threw herself into her brother's arms.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### OCTAVIA.

In the gardens of a villa, built upon the promontory of Actium, and overlooking the Ambraciot Gulf, stood he, upon whom all the eyes of the world were bent. Beyond, on the plain, was encamped his army, and below, in the gulf, lay his fleet of war. Out in the open sea rode the ships of his rival, who had arrived the preceding day, and on the opposite side of the gulf gleamed the white tents of the Octavian legions.

But critical as was the situation, with swords ready to leap from their scabbards, and with the beacon, the lighting of which would be the signal for war, prepared, Antony's thoughts were elsewhere. Ever since sending the message to Cleo-



patra, he had watched in a state of feverish excitement for the coming of the queen. He was moody, absent-minded, and silent, with no thoughts but for the queen's arrival, and no interest in any other plans. He was constantly on the look-out for her, and he would frequently wander away alone by himself to the shore, and, gazing out upon the sea, torture himself with speculations as to whether she would come.

Even the arrival of the fleet and army of Octavius, which was of such dire import, roused him but little. In vain did Ventidius and the other leaders urge him to action, in vain were the signs of dissatisfaction among his followers pointed out to him ; he refused to make any move or declare any decision as to the future, until Cleopatra's coming was no longer in doubt.

Beneath a clump of trees, at a little distance from the moody general, stood Ventidius, Dercetas and Eros. This dotage of Antony's had driven them to their wits' end. There was nothing more to be done save wait and pray to the gods for some miracle to restore to them their leader in all his old-time force and brilliancy.

Suddenly Ventidius started, and, grasping Dercetas by the arm, he pointed down the wind-



ing pathway which led from the promontory to the seashore below. A woman, young and richly dressed, was slowly ascending the path. She was alone; no attendants of any sort accompanied her, but close to the shore lay a magnificently decorated boat, from which she had evidently just landed.

"Do my old eyes deceive me?" exclaimed Ventidius, excitedly, "or is not that the noble Octavia, our general's wife?"

Eros shaded his eyes with his hand from the rays of the hot August sun.

"You are right," he said, "it is indeed she. She is a brave woman to come thus unattended into the camp of the enemy."

"The camp of the enemy!" repeated Ventidius, indignantly. "She would not thank you, Eros, for that speech. Enemies we are to Cæsar, but there is no man here who is an enemy to Octavia. The gods be praised that she has come! Her influence may effect what ours has been unable to accomplish."

And down the path the old soldier hurried to meet the approaching figure.

As Octavia saw the scarred visage of the man she knew to be her husband's friend, and whose



rugged virtues and downright honesty she herself had learned to respect, she smiled, and stretched out both her hands to him.

"Tell me of my lord, good Ventidius," she said. "Is he well?"

"Ay, madam, well in body, but sick in spirit. Ever watching for a sign from Egypt."

Octavia shuddered.

"The rumor is true, then," she said, her sweet lips trembling. "He has sent for Cleopatra."

"Only too true, madam."

"May Juno aid me, then. I fear my mission is in vain. Where is my lord?"

"Above, madam, in the garden, his eyes ever scanning the east."

"Lead me to him."

Slowly they approached to where Antony stood, with his back leaning against a tree, and his eyes fixed upon that point in the distant horizon where first Cleopatra's fleet might be expected to appear. He was so absorbed that he did not notice the approach of Octavia and Ventidius until the latter touched him upon the shoulder.

"General, I bring you a visitor that should drive away your melancholy."

Antony turned, and as his eyes fell upon Oc-



tavia, who stood blushing and trembling before him, he uttered a suppressed exclamation, and the color forsook his cheeks. He could not avoid a certain sense of shame at sight of the gentle, uncomplaining wife he had so cruelly ill-treated.

"What! Octavia here?" he cried.

"Yes, Octavia," said Ventidius, sternly. "Is she poison to you, that you look upon her thus?"

Octavia raised her eyes pleadingly to his face—the face, that, in spite of all, she loved.

"Have you no welcome for me?" she asked, in a low voice. "Not even such courtesy of greeting as a stranger might expect? Antony! Husband! Who am I, then, that you should treat me thus?"

"Cæsar's sister."

"That's unkind. Had I been no more than Cæsar's sister, I should have remained in Rome. But I am Octavia, who, though forsaken by you, am still your wife. Abandoning all my pride, I have come to beg your kindness."

As she spoke, she took his hand in hers and raised it submissively to her lips.

In spite of himself, Antony was touched by his wife's unselfishness and magnanimity.

"What is it you wish?" he asked.

"Be reconciled to Cæsar."



"Never! What! shall I, who by a nod can make of a slave a king, fall down and blubber: 'Forgive me, Cæsar!' No! Such words would choke me."

"Nor need you speak them. Think you I have come to ask you to abase yourself? No, Antony, your honor is mine. It never shall be said Octavia's husband sued to her brother, Cæsar though he be. Yielding to my prayers, Octavius stands with outstretched hand, ready to clasp yours in renewed amity, if you but make the sign. All that I ask is peace, peace between the two I love, my brother and my husband."

Antony made an impatient movement, which he could not repress.

"And this peace means a return to Rome, my every action spied upon."

"No," said Octavia, bravely forcing back her tears; "you are free, free from her you loathe. I am as proud as you, and scorn to beg for your love as alms. I will tell my brother you agree to peace. We will return to Rome, and you shall march to rule the East. No word of complaint shall pass my lips. But let me at least keep the barren name of wife, although your love is elsewhere."



As she paused Antony gazed at her with a softened look. Pity plead strongly in his heart for her. His breast was rent with contending emotions, his love for Cleopatra and his sense of what was due to his wife, his friends, and his country.

"Listen to justice," said Ventidius. "Be once more the Antony you were, general, triumvir, emperor!"

Emperor! At this word Antony's eyes flashed. All his old ambition was aroused. Why not? Was not the imperial crown within his grasp? He had but to reach out his hand to take it. For the moment, Cleopatra's image, which had been so constantly before him, faded away, and in its place he saw a vision of himself, clad in imperial purple, a scepter in his hand, the world at his feet.

Octavia moved closer to his side and laid her hand upon his arm.

"If I can offer pardon," she said, softly, "can not you afford to take it?"

The extraordinary magnanimity exhibited by Octavia moved Antony deeply, and his better nature momentarily asserted itself. He took the hand, which rested upon his arm, and raised it to his lips.



"It is for me," he said, "to implore that pardon. Gentle Octavia, yours is the triumph. Go, as an envoy of peace, from me to Octavius, and bring back to me a decisive answer."

Octavia's soft blue eyes shone with a happy light.

"And the war-beacon will not be lighted?"

"I will make no move until your return. I have been but a poor mate for you, Octavia, but hereafter all shall be atoned for. If the answer you bring is a favorable one, from to-morrow Cæsar and I are one."

He embraced Octavia tenderly, and watched her until she had descended below the brow of the declivity; then, ordering Ventidius and the other two, who had been curiously watching the interview at a little distance, to follow him, he strode rapidly toward the house, without one further glance at the sea he had been eagerly scanning for so many days.

Why was it that Ventidius' countenance showed but little of the delight that should naturally have appeared there at the success of Octavia's mission? Although the sky above was sunny, there was a little cloud upon the horizon that presaged a storm; for upon that horizon the still, keen eyes



of the old soldier had detected a series of little black spots that were, in all probability, a fleet of vessels. Could it be Cleopatra, with her warships? If so, the resolution of the general would be but short-lived. In a struggle between the simple Roman matron and the wily Egyptian queen, what hope would there be for the former? If Cleopatra appeared upon the scene, all was lost. With a prayer that the evil might be averted, Ventidius followed in the footsteps of his master.

In the meanwhile, with a light heart, Octavia was hurrying down the path to the seashore. As she reached the foot of the promontory she saw coming toward her a tall, dark, heavily bearded man, accompanied by two women, dressed in white robes of Grecian fashion. One, the taller, who moved with a grace that attracted at once Octavia's attention, was heavily veiled, and only the outline of her features could be seen through the thick covering. The other, however, had thrown back her veil, and revealed a delicate face, with blue eyes and golden hair. The man carried, thrown across his shoulder, a heavy rug. The trio had evidently just landed from a small boat, which two oarsmen were slowly pulling away from the shore.



Involuntarily, moved by some strange impulse of curiosity, Octavia paused and waited their approach.

Suddenly the man caught sight of her, and stopping, turned and addressed a few words to his companions. Then the three moved on again.

As they came abreast of her, Octavia, for some reason which she could not explain, addressed them :

"Whither are you bound?" she said.

The girl, whose face was uncovered, looked at her in some surprise.

"To the village," she answered.

"But," said Octavia, "you will have to pass through the camp and——"

But she was interrupted by the dark-faced man, who said, with a scowl :

"That is my affair. Who are you, to presume to interfere?"

Octavia drew herself up with dignity.

"I!" she answered, quietly. "I am Octavia, Mark Antony's wife."

At these words the taller of the two women, the one who was veiled, uttered a sharp cry, tottered, and caught for support at the arm of the man, whose manner had suddenly undergone a great



change. He seemed perplexed and alarmed. The other woman hastened to the side of the first, and threw her arm about her.

"What is the matter?" asked Octavia. "Is she ill?"

"Yes," said the blue-eyed girl, hurriedly. "She is a young slave, who has just arrived from Athens. The voyage has been a severe one, and——"

"Poor thing!" said Octavia, kindly, approaching nearer. "Perhaps I may be of some service. What is your name?"

Thus addressed, the woman shrank closer to the man, and pulled her vail still more tightly about her face. At the same time the other stepped in between, as if to shield her.

"She is ill and suffering," she said. "Far from her family, for the first time, all is strange and terrifying to her."

In spite of herself, Octavia felt a strong interest in the stranger, whose face she could not see.

"Come to me to-night," she said, "at the villa above on the promontory. If liberty would restore her health, I would purchase her and set her free."

Then, with one long glance at the shrouded



form, she turned and moved down the beach to where her boat lay moored.

After she had entered it, and the boat, propelled by its sturdy oarsmen, was moving slowly toward the open sea where lay Octavius' fleet, the fair-haired girl touched the other lightly and reverently upon the arm.

"Beloved mistress," she said, "be reassured. She has gone."

As if the gentle touch had been the sting of an adder, the other started violently, and with a quick motion flung back her vail, revealing, as she did so, the face of the most beautiful woman in the world, Octavia's dreaded rival—but a face that was now pale as death and convulsed with violent emotion.

With a strained, far-away look in her lovely dark eyes, she watched the receding boat, her breath coming quick and fast with the feelings of anger and shame that filled her breast.

"What!" she thought. "It is true, then? I—I, the daughter of kings, have blushed—blushed for the first time! A word from that woman's lips has overwhelmed me. She questioned me, and I did not dare to answer her, nor even to cast one look upon her face. I was afraid of my voice,



afraid of my eyes. Strange caprice! incredible mystery! that I, who longed so to see her—who, forgetting my rank, would have gone to Rome to insult her, who hate her as my rival—I—I could do nothing! Did I recognize in her that far-famed Roman virtue? Yes, Brutus, you were right. Virtue is not a vain name—a lie! No, it is an authority, an immense force, a precious gift, a divine treasure! Ah, would that I knew it! would that I felt it! Oh, African sun, god of day, god of fire, you make a jest of all efforts toward purity, and, pitilessly laughing at our vain resolutions, inject your ardor into the blood of our veins. Curses upon you for having been the cause of what I have suffered! You have soiled my heart, blackened my life! Be accursed! If your fatal light could one day disappear and fail the terrified world, I would like to be present at your final setting and see sink for the last time your meteor of blood; and then alone, far from the noisy world, breathe in the freshness of eternal night. My shame and my weakness are due to your fires. Had it not been for you my life would have been different. No derisive epithets would have been flung at me by ribald tongues; beneath my crown my forehead would have gleamed un-



smirched ; there would have been no spot upon my royal mantle ; I should have gone on my way followed by the respect of all ; I could have borne unflinchingly the gaze of Octavia. Well, can I not still, by the force of my intellect, drive out the impetuous fever from my blood, be so virtuous as to vie with the Roman, and conquer Antony anew ? Let Antony repudiate Octavia, and let me, a queen, establish among kings the sovereign power of virtue."

Lost in these reflections, her eyes still fixed upon the bark which was bearing away Octavia, and which was now scarcely more than a mere speck, Cleopatra had become entirely oblivious to her surroundings. She was roused to a sense of reality by the voice of Iras, saying, timidly :

"Cleopatra ! Royal mistress !"

She started, and passed her hand over her eyes, as if awaking from a dream. And so it was a dream—a dream of purity of life and of virtuous greatness which had never visited Egypt's Queen before, and which would never visit her again. Octavia, speed as quickly as you will upon your errand. It is all in vain. Your gentleness and goodness are no match for the brilliancy and fascination of the wondrous serpent of old Nile.



With a quick gesture, as if to shut out forever the vision that had been for an instant before her eyes, Cleopatra turned her back to the sea, and looked upward to the promontory where Antony was, with a smile of conscious power upon her perfect lips.

"Go on, Kephren!" she said, in a voice of ringing command.

Slowly they ascended the winding path, until they came to a thick grove of ilex trees, into which they vanished.

A quarter of an hour afterward Kephren emerged alone, still carrying in his arms the rug, but which now seemed much more bulkish and heavier. He completed the ascent and crossed the garden. At the door of the villa he was stopped by a guard, who demanded his business.

"A rug for the room of the general."

After some parleying he was allowed to enter, and was conducted by a slave to Antony's private apartment, a room with large windows opening to the ground and looking out upon the gardens and the sea below.

Here he deposited his burden upon the floor, at the foot of the bed, and followed the slave from the room.



For a moment or two all was silence, and then a tearing, cutting sound was heard, the gleam of a dagger was visible slashing through the sides of the rug, and from its folds emerged Cleopatra.

As once, years before, she had been borne into the presence of Cæsar, so now, in the same manner, had she eluded the guards and gained entrance to Antony.

Flushed and rosy, she stood for a moment breathless from her confinement, and then, stepping out from the heavy rug which lay about her feet, she advanced curiously to the door. There she listened for a moment, and then looked round for a place to hide, in case she should be surprised by any other than Antony.

In one corner was a low bed, draped with heavy silken curtains. She unloosened the curtains, and stood there silently waiting, her exquisite figure, in its white robes, outlined against the dark background of the draperies. The struggle was close at hand, but she had no fear of the result; and her lip curled with a sort of self-contempt as she remembered the feelings with which she had watched the boat and its occupant, the Roman matron, that paragon of all the virtues, Octavia!



## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE VOICE OF THE CHARMER.

In a large room on the ground floor of the villa, which ordinarily was used as the banquet hall, were gathered together Antony and the captains of his legions, Ventidius, Dercetas, Philo, Canidius and Scarus. Their beloved general was once more restored to them, and, save for the dark forebodings in the breast of old Ventidius, joy was in the hearts of all. Ready, as they would have been, to follow Antony to the battle-field and fight to the death for him, they were all glad that civil war was to be averted, and that the reproaches that had been leveled in Rome at their leader for his mad infatuation were now to be silenced.

Their joy, however, was destined to be but of short duration, for their deliberations were interrupted by the hurried entrance of Eros, his beardless face flushed with excitement.

Before Ventidius, whose fears foretold him what



was about to happen, could prevent him, he rushed up to him, and exclaimed :

“The Egyptian fleet is here! They approach on the other side of the promontory from where Cæsar’s ships are at anchor.”

In an instant all was confusion. For a moment Antony stood irresolute, and then, without a word, he turned and rushed from the room.

Ventidius uttered a savage oath.

“Fool!” he said to Eros. “What have you done? Curses upon that black-browed queen! Another hour and all would have been well!”

But the others did not wait to listen to his lamentations. Eager to see for themselves if the news were true and what would be the outcome of it, they hurried after Antony, and Ventidius was left alone.

“It is not too late, yet!” he exclaimed, striking his hands angrily together. “It shall not be too late! If there is one spark of manliness left in him, I will save him in spite of all. Diomedes! Diomedes shall speak!”

Meanwhile, swift as the wings of love, Antony had sped to his bedroom, from the window of which a view of the sea could be obtained.

Yes, it was true. With their white sails out-



spread to the gentle evening breeze, were slowly approaching an immense fleet of Egyptian ships of war. Cleopatra had granted the request in his message. She sent him aid. But, was the queen herself on board? In that thought all else was forgotten. Once more he was mad with longing. Cæsar, Octavia, peace, ambition, all mattered but little. His one desire was to look once more upon that fair face that held him in thralldom. Little did he reckon how close to him was the object of his longing; that, through an opening in the silken curtains just behind him, was bent upon him the passionate gaze of her, for whom he was ready to sacrifice all.

Into the room hurried Dercetas and the others.

"See," cried Antony, to them. "It is true! She is here! Here at last!"

But his comrades did not share his enthusiasm. After one quick glance through the broad windows, they gazed at one another with looks of fear and consternation. The arrival of the Egyptian fleet would mean destruction to all their hopes of peace.

"She is here! She is here!" continued Antony, beside himself with excitement. "The wonder of the world! Cleopatra! My Cleopatra!"



"Your Cleopatra!" repeated a deep voice, scornfully. "Yes, your Cleopatra, perhaps, but not yours alone!"

At these bold words, Antony turned from the window with a quick movement. Beside him stood Ventidius, his scarred face stern and lowering; and, just behind the old soldier, was a tall, thin man, with dark complexion, and narrow, slanting eyes.

"Your Cleopatra, indeed!" continued Ventidius, in the same contemptuous voice. "Any man's Cleopatra! All men's Cleopatra!"

"What mean you?" thundered Antony, his features convulsed with rage, and menacingly raising his clenched hand.

But not one atom did the brave old soldier flinch. He was there to recall his master to reason, by all means in his power, and do his duty he would, even though it might cost him his life.

Wonderingly and breathlessly the others listened. Diomedes, who on his flight from Memphis, had sought Ventidius and put himself under his protection, shrank behind the broad-shouldered form of his patron. Frank and honest, old Ventidius had no liking for or trust in the cun-



ning, slippery Egyptian, but, after listening to his story, he had concluded to keep him by him, thinking that some day he might be of use to him. And the time had now come when he was determined that he should speak. The weapon was an unworthy one, but the case was desperate, and all means were fair.

"Strike, if you will," he said, calmly. "But my long services to you deserve a better recompense than blows."

Antony's arm dropped, although his brow was still dark with anger.

"I implore you, my lord, to listen," said Ventidius. "In honor's name I ask, for manhood's sake, and for your own safety, give heed unto my words."

Antony folded his arms.

"Speak, then!" he said. "I will have patience."

"What is this woman for whose coming you now watch, whom, perchance, one of those very vessels is now bearing to you? Who is she that, for her sake, you would abandon all dictates of honor? Rarely beautiful, I grant you. But do not Octavia's virtues outweigh her beauty? Why forsake your wife and wreck your fortunes for—a wanton?"



The veins in Antony's forehead stood out like whipcords, and his eyes flashed with rage.

"Now, by Hercules——"

"Nay, hear me out, and, if I do not prove my words, deal with me as you will."

"Go on!"

"What has this woman been? What is her past? You are not her only lover. There has been Cæsar, Pompey, Sextus, Herod—why, their name is myriads. She is capable of consigning lovers, from her fatal arms, to sudden and ignominious death. Cæsar quitted the enchantress, a myrtle-wreathed victim, decked out for republican vengeance. But the great have not been alone the victims of her wiles. She has given herself to the embraces of a slave."

"Knave, 'tis false!"

"Speak, Diomedes, and, my lord, for your own honor, be calm."

Trembling with terror, Diomedes advanced. Although his vengeance was now in his hands, the white-livered wretch scarce dared to speak the words that would give it to him.

"My noble lord——" he began.

"Oh, 'tis you," interrupted Antony. "I recognize you well. So, since it is this old man's will,



a man whose services I cannot forget, that I should hear you, say your say. But no fine-set speeches; plain, homespun truth is what I want. Justify this injured queen, your queen, if you can. But, beware of calumny, or your wretched life shall pay the penalty!"

"My lord, I grieve to say that noble Ventidius has spoken the truth."

And then, fearfully, he proceeded to tell the story of Pharon in all its details. Antony listened, with great difficulty controlling himself. As Diomedes finished, Ventidius asked:

"Are you satisfied, my lord?"

"Satisfied!" cried Antony. "Satisfied! Ten thousand times, no! And even if all this traitor says be true, what matters it? It was before I knew her. Before Tarsus, her life was her own to do with as she chose. Since, then, alone, have I claims upon her constancy."

"And if, since then, I prove her false?"

"Beware, Ventidius, my patience is well-nigh exhausted, and I may forget even your gray hairs."

"It is the duty that I owe to you, my lord, that bids me speak, and even your anger cannot stay me. Diomedes, speak further of what you know.



Fear not. The general has given you leave to speak."

"Alas, my lord," faltered Diomedes, "that I should have to say it. On your departure your place was usurped by another."

"Liar!" roared Antony, now livid with rage; "his name, slave, his name!"

But Diomedes was now so alarmed that his lips could scarcely frame the word: "Kephren," but low as it was uttered, Antony caught it.

"Kephren!" he exclaimed. "Kephren!"

Diomedes started back before the fury he had roused; but Ventidius was nothing daunted. He had heard the story before from the Egyptian's lips, and, false though it was, had been deceived by it. So he thoroughly believed that he was speaking the truth, when he said:

"Yes, my lord, Kephren, the captain of the guard, whose passion for the queen has long been no secret, is now the favored one. A slave, a lackey, now governs Egypt."

Once more, in mad fury, was Antony's hand raised to strike, but, as he met Ventidius eyes, it dropped again. Even in his anger, he could not find it in his heart to offer a blow to his old and



tried friend. With a mighty effort, he forced himself into a semblance of control.

Pointing to the window, he said :

"There lies the fleet of Egypt's queen. She alone shall answer these evil tales. Go. Bring her here! Go quickly, and, as you value your lives, dare not return and tell me that she has not come."

But, before one of them could move a step in obedience to the command, these words, in a clear, melodious voice, fell upon their startled ears :

"That, they cannot do, for it would be a lie!"

The curtains parted, and before them appeared the queen herself, her superb eyes flashing with a bluish glitter, and her radiant beauty kindled into flame with anger and indignation.

Involuntarily the Roman captains started back, while Diomedes, pale as ashes, fell prostrate on his face before her.

Antony uttered a great cry: "Cleopatra!" and then stood as if turned to stone, his eyes fixed upon the exquisite vision before him.

With a glance withering in its scorn, Cleopatra turned to Antony's companions.

"Go!"

Without a word, the soldiers filed out of the



room, even Ventidius venturing no remonstrance, perhaps, because he understood that all words from him would now be worse than vain.

Diomedes made a movement to rise, but, with the spring of a panther, Cleopatra was at his side and set her foot savagely upon his neck.

"No ! You remain !" she hissed.

Then, spurning him from her, she advanced slowly to where Antony still stood, silent and motionless.

"I am here," she said, in her sweet, musical voice, each accent of which made Antony's heart throb with love and longing. "I am here to answer the charges that have been brought against me."

Antony replied never a word. He seemed frozen into silence. His eyes remained riveted upon her. In her simple Grecian robe, which fell about her in soft, creamy folds, with no ornament save the diamond buckle that confined her hair, her beauty seemed more wondrous than ever.

"You have heard it said," she proceeded, sorrowfully and tenderly, "that Cæsar first possessed my love. Not so ! Cæsar loved me, but I loved Antony. Ah ! How often have I wished some



other, great as Cæsar, would court my love to be refused for Antony! And yet, sighing kings have laid their scepters at my feet, dare I say not wholly for my crown? But to be refused for you. To be less than wife to you, I have disdained their lawful suit. The slanderous tongues, whose utterance we have just heard, have accused me of—— Ah! I will not, cannot repeat it. To some, my lord, I plead guilty. I am no cold, Roman woman. The fires of the Orient burn hotly in my veins. To their accusations, you answered: 'Before Tarsus, her life was her own to do with as she chose.' There spoke my generous lord. Thanks, thanks, noble Antony, for those words. But since first my happy eyes gazed on your dear face, though a thousand rumors shriek their lies into the gaping world, not once, I swear it by Isis and Osiris, not once have I been faithless in thought, word or deed, to the man who has been, is, and ever will be, the god of my idolatry!"

As if suffocated by her emotion, she paused, her lovely eyes suffused, her bosom heaving beneath the folds of her tunic. Could this be royal Egypt, this panting, trembling woman, changing color with every throb of her heart?



"But—but," said Antony, in a hollow whisper.  
"Kephren?"

Instantly the queen's face changed. She threw back her head, with a contemptuous curl of the lip.

"Kephren," she called, in a ringing voice of command.

In obedience to her call, the door of the inner chamber, where the captain of the guard had concealed himself after bearing his mistress to Antony's chamber, opened, and the man summoned appeared.

Advancing to the queen, he bowed low before her.

She turned again to Antony.

"Your friend," she said, "who repeated this slander, lied. This man, whom he pretended I loved, is merely a devoted slave, and nothing more."

"Prove it!" said Antony, huskily.

"How?"

"By killing him this instant before my eyes."

Cleopatra turned a shade paler. She knew Kephren's unswerving devotion, and valued it.

"Be it so," she said, briefly.

She approached a table on which was a silver



goblet and an amphora of water. Filling the goblet half full, she drew from her finger a ring carved with a head of Rameses the Great, pressed a spring and let two drops of a heavy, greenish liquid fall from it into the water. Then she took the cup in her hands, and, without a tremor, handed it to the unfortunate captain of the guard.

"When the Great Queen commands, it is for her servants to obey," said Kephren, calmly, and raised the goblet to his lips.

But, before he could drain the draught, Antony sprang forward and snatched it from him.

"Enough!" he cried, rapturously. "Enough! I am convinced! It is enough to justify you both!"

Raising his hand he was about to cast the goblet through the open window, but Cleopatra, with a sudden movement, seized his arm and prevented him.

"No!" she cried. "It still has its work to do, and this time it will be offered to the guilty and not to the innocent."

She seized the cup, and flashed a fierce look upon the still prostrate form of the man who had sought to do her injury.



"Rise, miserable wretch!" she commanded.  
"Rise, I say."

Slowly and with difficulty, Diomedes obeyed. His face was livid, and his shaking limbs could scarcely support him. He knew that his hour had come.

"Drink!"

His lips moved as if in appeal, but no sound issued from them.

"Drink!"

Mechanically he took the cup and, so terrified as to be half bereft of his senses, scarce knowing what he was doing, he swallowed the potion.

Then, with a wild shriek, he fell headlong to the ground, where he lay writhing in agony, his eyes bulging from his head and a white foam issuing from his mouth. Suddenly, his limbs stiffened, and, after one last horrible convulsion, he lay dead at the feet of Cleopatra, who was watching his agony with a hard, cruel look about her lips.

"Kephren, drag that carrion away!" she said.  
"And so perish all the enemies of Cleopatra."

Then, as Kephren disappeared with the unfortunate wretch, her face underwent a wondrous



change; and she turned to Antony with a soft, alluring smile, a sweet, bewildering glance.

"Are you satisfied?" she said. "Am I forgiven?"

"Forgiven!" he cried. "It is I who am the culprit, not you! I have but one desire, to live and die at the queen's feet."

Her lithe, shapely figure swayed toward him.

"Not at her feet, but close to her heart."

The perfume of her breath intoxicated him; the lovelight in her eyes stirred the blood in his veins to fever. He flung his arms about her and crushed her to his breast with an ardor that was almost savage in its intensity, and his lips met hers in one long, fierce, passionate kiss.

Once more she lay, in her matchless beauty, within his embrace, and to keep her there he was ready to sacrifice the whole earth.

Oh! boat, carrying the gentle woman with the message of peace hidden in the folds of her robe, your speed is of no avail. You will arrive too late. Cleopatra has reconquered her lover.

"My adored queen!" said Antony, releasing her a little, in order to feast his eyes upon her loveliness. "Ye gods! how pale she is!"

"I have been so long separated from you," she



murmured. "I have suffered so much. My courage is at an end. Oh! let us never part again!"

"I will follow you everywhere."

She looked up at him with something that was almost shyness.

"But you are no longer free?"

"Your love delivers me from all ties."

"You see now that without you I cannot live."

"Ah! what dangers you must have braved to come and join me here—the long voyage, Cæsar and the Romans, the pirates who swarm everywhere in these seas. How could I not love you after such heroic devotion."

"Antony, my dear lord!"

"Yours is all my love, yours is all my life!"

She wound her white arms about his neck and laid her head upon his shoulder, thinking, with swelling heart:

"Oh, fool that I was to envy Octavia!"

A confused sound of voices and the trampling of feet were heard outside. In another moment, the door was flung open and Ventidius and Der-cetas, followed by a score of soldiers, hurriedly entered the room.



"What means this intrusion?" exclaimed Antony, angrily.

"General, Octavia has landed, bringing humble terms of peace."

Cleopatra paled and moved closer to Antony. What would be his response. It was quick to come.

"There is no Octavia! Now, we will light the fire that is to be the symbol of discord between Cæsar and me! Blessed be war, my queen, which, separating us from the rest of the world, unites us once again!"

"Let me be the one to apply the torch!" cried Cleopatra.

And out into the shadowy garden she flew, followed by Antony and the rest, to where the fagots had been prepared. In another instant, a multitude of sparks flashed out from the dry twigs, and then a pillar of fire shot up and swayed between earth and heaven. War was declared!

A mighty shout rent the air, as the soldiers came running from all sides.

"To-morrow the battle," shouted Antony, "and, in a month, at Rome! To Rome, my friends! On to Rome!"

Octavia, who had nearly reached the summit



of the promontory, saw the lurid light of the beacon flash out against the sky. It was as if an arrow had pierced her heart, and she stopped short.

"Madam," said just above her a voice, which she recognized as that of Ventidius. "Madam, you come too late! The queen is here!"

The poor woman covered her face with her hands.

"Alas!" she sobbed, "I am forced to succumb. It is vain for me to seek resignation. I would give all, rank, fortune, good name, for the shameful happiness of a loved mistress."

And above in the garden, close to her lover, stood Cleopatra, erect, palpitating with excitement, her dark hair unloosened and her eyes glistening like stars, while the glancing flames of the direful beacon stained with blood-red spots her white drapery.

"Ah!" she murmured low to herself. "He shall never return to Rome! Rome means Octavia!"



## CHAPTER XV.

## AFTER ACTIUM.

The battle had ended in defeat, the defeat in rout.

Both Antony and Octavius had powerful fleets at sea and great armies on land, but Antony was strongest in land troops. In the deliberations that followed the lighting of the war-beacon, Ventidius and all the other officers sought, by all arguments in their power, to induce the general not to trust himself to the sea. But Cleopatra, who was present at the council, opposed them, and the infatuated Antony turned a deaf ear to his companions' words and declared that the queen should have her way.

"Besides," she said, "if you fight by land I cannot be there to see; but at sea, from the Antoniad, I can witness your triumph."

"I implore you, queen," said Ventidius, "not to think of that. To have you there would be fatal."



"Fatal!" cried Cleopatra. "Why fatal? Why should I be deprived of all participation in the glory of the war, when my ships and forces are engaged in it? Besides, the Egyptians would be disheartened were I to leave them, and would be much less efficient if their queen were not present to urge them on. I am not a woman to be an embarrassment and a source of care, but a sovereign, accustomed to the command of armies."

Antony was only too ready to be persuaded, and it was decided that the queen should be placed in command of her own fleet.

In the morning all was in readiness. Cleopatra, with her ships, took a station in reserve, and remained there for a time, a quiet witness of the battle. It was an obstinate and bloody conflict. The great ships dashed against each other, and the men, inspired by their leaders, fought from deck to deck. The two fleets were very nearly equal, and the issue was in doubt. But at the critical moment of the battle Cleopatra ordered the sails of the Antoniad to be hoisted, and, followed by all her ships, fled from the scene.

As soon as Antony perceived that she was going, even in the very heat of the struggle, forgetful of all save that one fact, he called up a



galley and, leaping on board, ordered the oarsmen to pull after the queen's flying trireme.

This decided the fight. Seeing that they were deserted by their leader, Antony's men soon gave up the struggle, and the day was lost.

Cleopatra sailed to Alexandria, and, horrified at what she had done, shut herself up in the palace of the Ptolemies.

To Alexandria, also, proceeded Antony, and encamped in a barren plain a short distance from the city, with twelve legions, all that remained of his once glorious army. For the direful news had been brought to him that Canidius, who had been in command of the land troops, had, after waiting in vain for Antony's return, surrendered his entire force to Octavius. Never was defeat more complete nor more shameful. There was not the slightest excuse for it. The land forces, in which lay Antony's greatest strength, had been conquered without striking a blow, and even to his fleet but comparatively little harm had been done.

Now that he realized the full effects of his folly, of the infamy of which he had been guilty, Antony was beside himself with rage and shame. Although he had abandoned all to fly in Cleopa-



tra's wake, he had made no attempt to see the queen ; he did not wish to see her. His remorse rendered him furious against her, who had been the cause of his misfortunes. All his love was turned to hate, and to a wild desire for revenge.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gloomy and sad lay the wretched camp of the once powerful triumvir in the shadowy darkness of the Eastern night. Behind rose, in black silhouette, the temples and palaces of imperial Alexandria. Before, calm as a mirror, stretched the placid waters of Lake Mareotis. Away to one side, a dozen vultures flapped their great wings in ever narrowing circles, making ready to pounce upon their prey—some dead king of the desert, perhaps.

Upon the sandy beach, alone and harrowed by torturing thoughts, Antony, haggard, unkempt, unshorn, paced nervously to and fro. One word was ringing ever in his ears, one word was striking ever upon his heart—*Actium* !

Oh, if the implacable Fates would but turn back the sands of time, and give him once more that hour when, like a demigod, he stood on the deck of his vessel defying the onslaught of Cæsar's



fleet, that hour before he had fled, leaving his astounded enemy the master of the seas. Would that horrible moment never be effaced? Was there no possible way to recapture the past? He would give his life and his thirty years of glory to tear the record of that day from the pages of history. Fame had been his most cherished dream, the fame that would live beyond the tomb; to be an immortal example for future ages, to have in his country a column of victory or a temple dedicated to him to reach an unknown summit on the ladder of glory. In his misery, he remembered how his mother, when he was a child, had related to him the triumphant exploits of Hercules, and how his bosom had swelled with pride, hope, and envy, as she said to him:

“Such was your ancestor, and you will equal him!”

Who would then have said that that mother had given birth to a coward, and that son, the object of so much tender care, was destined one day to fly before the enemy? Antony's fall had made Cæsar great. Cæsar, a warrior who knew not how to wield his sword, nor to rally with his voice a wavering phalanx. At Philippi he said that he was ill; he was afraid. And it was such



an adversary the gods had permitted to vanquish the greatest general of Rome!

In his anguish, he cried aloud, in the silence and the night:

“How my enemies will rejoice in my fall! And you, phantom—you, the most cruel of them all—Cicero, Cicero! How happy you must be, if you can hear my groans from the depths of the abyss into which I have been plunged! I have made truths of your blackest lies. Upon your writings I have placed the divine seal. You were only an orator; I have made of you an inspired prophet. But what do I say? Never did your severest thoughts go so far as to foresee this shameful flight. You accused me of pride, ambitious plans, infamous cruelties, audacious thefts, crimes which sullied the majesty of Rome. Flatterer! I have surpassed the dreams of your hatred. Come, then, and thank Antony, you who were his accuser; he has saved you from being branded by posterity as an impostor!”

He ceased his muttering and continued his restless pacing back and forth upon the sands. Soon his thoughts took another turn. What mattered the hatred and rejoicings of his enemies? What should alone occupy his mind and weigh



him down with remorse were his friends, his companions-at-arms, whose valor he had scorned, whose faith he had betrayed. While they were dying for him, he, their unworthy chief, had quitted them, without a word, without a sign, without recompensing them with even a last farewell. They called him their father, their emperor, while he——! Oh, curses on the fatal siren that had lured him to his ruin!

And the strong man stopped and buried his face in his hands, convulsed with an agony for which there was no remedy.

Suddenly he raised his head, and, flinging out his arms, cried aloud:

“And what has become of you, my rebellious old soldier, who predicted all this? Ventidius! Ventidius!”

As if in answer to his call, there was a rush across the sand of hurrying steps, and in another moment the man he had invoked was by his side. The old veteran had come to join his fortunes to those of his master, to whom he was as loyal in the days of his ruin as he had ever been in the days of his prosperity.

As he looked upon Antony's worn, pallid face,



a great lump rose in his throat and choked his utterance.

"Ventidius!" exclaimed Antony, seizing both his hands. "Now, praised be the gods, who have answered my prayer! Whence do you come, old friend, and—and what news do you bring?"

"The worst, most noble Antony. Canidius——"

"Well, what of him?"

"Weary of waiting, he has surrendered to Octavius."

"'Tis my just deserts. Oh, Ventidius, where can I hide myself? My shame is devouring me. Yet, I am happy to see you again. Actium! Actium!"

"General," said Ventidius, deeply moved, "that was a day of misfortune. To-morrow you will conquer, if—you are no longer a slave to love. The gods sent women upon earth to arrest the impulse of souls too valiant, to prevent those of vast genius becoming too powerful, and to equalize men. They do their duty; women have wings, and men leave their honor to run after them. So henceforth do as your soldiers do. We will take no more women to battle."

Antony made no reply. What reply could he



have made? Ah, had he but always followed the advice of this sage counsellor!

"My friend," he said, at last, "how did you find me?"

Ventidius pointed to the sleeping city.

"Yonder," he said, "is Alexandria, and——"

"No more!" interrupted Antony, half fiercely. "I understand. But why did you come to me? Cæsar would have given you——"

"I do not love Cæsar. Below in Greece, we awaited your arrival; but, as you did not come, day by day our ranks grew less, and finally Canidius, the ingrate, left during the night and sought Octavius. Then I said to myself: 'I am no longer a soldier, so I can travel. My wound is not dangerous. I will go and visit the port of Alexandria.'"

These words touched Antony deeply. There were some loyal hearts still left to him. The salt tears stung in his eyes.

"I do not deserve such devotion," he said, with a sorrowful humility. Then, suddenly, he turned, and in the dim light scrutinized his companion. One arm hung helpless in a sling.

"Wounded!" cried Antony. "Wounded in that combat, whence I fled like a coward. Ah!" turn-



ing away, "leave me! I cannot bear the sight."

But Ventidius laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"You were still there when I received this wound," he said, with a rough attempt at consolation.

"It is useless to try to ease my remorse," replied Antony, despairingly.

Then, for an instant, there was silence, both hearts too full for utterance.

"Tell me, my friend," said Antony, at last, "tell me the number and the names of the dead."

"Five thousand, they say. Justeius is of the number."

"Divinities of the Styx," cried Antony, "have mercy upon his shade! And Straton?"

"He fell into the sea and perished."

"Straton once saved my life. Oh, bitter memory! Scarus?"

"Dead, also."

"Scarus! A fatal loss! He was the last hero that remained from Pharsala. Donatus?"

"He, too, was killed, and, as he fell, he said, with a laugh: 'It would have been wrong for Antony not to keep his appointment.'"

The darkness of the night hid the burning



flush that dyed Antony's face and neck. Mad-man, fool that he had been!

"Like blades of grass," he groaned, "all my old companions have been mowed down by the keen sickle of Death. Cneius, in command of the left squadron, fought valiantly; what became of him?"

"He held out for a long time against the enemy, but after your departure——"

"No," interrupted Antony, bitterly. "Say the word. My flight."

"He yielded to Cæsar, and is now counted among his followers. But, to do him justice, Cneius was the last to join him."

"And you?"

Ventidius hesitated a moment, and cast a furtive glance to where an enormous rock cast its shadow upon the sands.

The moon was rising over the lake, dispelling the darkness and flooding all things with its soft radiance.

"I am not alone, nor was I the only one who refused to join his fortunes to Cæsar's."

He raised his voice and gave a loud, shrill call. In answer to the summons, a score of men emerged from behind the rock, and hurrying for-



ward knelt at the feet of Antony, who, too astounded to speak, recognized among them the faces of some of his most trusted captains—Dercetas, Philo, Eros, and others.

"These have come with me," said Ventidius, "with ten legions at their back. We one and all acknowledge Antony as our chief, and we wish no other leader than he."

Antony's whole frame shook, something suspiciously like moisture glistened in his eye, and his voice came very low and hoarse, as he said:

"Rise, my friends, rise. No, I have lost my fair fame; you must keep yours. I should but teach you to fly——"

"But, general," interrupted Dercetas, impetuously springing to his feet, "that counts for naught. That was a naval fight. We soldiers need a firmer base for our feet; the sea is foreign to us, the land is our friend. Mother earth loves to hold us pressed to her breast, upon which we have poured forth our blood. Cæsar has taken the sea, but the land is ours. Lead us, then, to combat!"

"Yes, lead us! lead us!" cried the others, thronging about him.

For an instant Antony's eyes flashed, the old



warrior spirit strong within him ; but then, with a groan, he waved them back.

“No,” he said, “Antony is unworthy of you. Below there in the harbor is a vessel loaded with treasure. Take it and depart, all of you, with your soldiers. Octavius will take you into his army. Leave me alone in my remorse, that will be eternal. Oh, it cuts me to the heart to see you all faithful to me ! Leave me ; this farewell is my last. Go, do not tempt the vengeance of the gods !”

No one stirred ; but they looked at one another in bewilderment, each waiting for the other to speak. How to combat this obstinate grief ?

While Antony had been speaking there had appeared on the beach, coming from the direction of the city, two figures—one a tall, heavily built man, and the other a woman, closely veiled. When they reached the rock the man paused in its shadow, and the woman continued on her way alone toward the group of soldiers. She was close upon them before any one noticed her. Ventidius was the first to do so, and he uttered a loud exclamation, which attracted the attention of the others. As Antony caught sight of the veiled figure he turned white to the lips. But whatever



his suspicion was, he was not left long in suspense. The woman, who was now within a few feet of them, threw back her vail and revealed the dark face of Charmian, the queen's waiting-woman.

No one spoke a word, but they all waited in breathless eagerness the explanation of her coming. She approached close to Antony, and, raising her eyes to his face said, in a low voice:

"Noble Antony, I bear a message from my sorrowing mistress."

Antony's brow grew dark with a heavy frown.

"The queen, my lord," proceeded Charmian, quickly, "is sick with grief. She begs to see you but once more."

"Never!" cried Antony. "Never more will I set eyes upon that false face!"

"She is ill, her cheeks furrowed with her tears——"

"Tears! I know what her tears are worth. So weeps the crocodile. Away! Return to her! No, I will not see her."

"Have pity, my lord!" pleaded Charmian. "Her despair is so great."

"No!"

"Cleopatra——"



"Silence! I forbid you to pronounce that name. Away, I say, and bear her back my answer: No! No! No! and, ten thousand times, no!"

Sorrowfully Charmian turned away, and made her way back to where her escort was awaiting her.

Ventidius, a great joy on his honest old face, struck his hands together, and cried aloud:

"Now, thanks be to Mars and all the gods! Antony is our own once more. At last he detests this black-browed enchantress, at last he knows her! No! No! No! and ten thousand times no! Those words will change the destiny of empires. Cæsar conspires in vain against liberty. Rome will soon resound with the cry: 'Brave Antony is come again!'"

"Brave!" retorted Antony, with intense bitterness. "Who can now boast of bravery? The brave Antony fled before the cowardly Octavius."

"No more of that, general," exclaimed Ventidius; "the time for repining is past. Be now, as ever, our leader. You have yet to learn that Octavius is not three days' march from here. If you do not lead us, it will be our ruin, for, with or without you, we are determined to risk the battle."



"Ye gods! but you tempt me."

"More than this," continued Ventidius, rapidly, and with increasing excitement, "it is rumored that Egypt's Queen has signed a treaty, by which she receives pardon as the reward for delivering you to Cæsar."

"By Jupiter Sator!" cried Antony. "That wench's message is now clearly understood. But dearly shall Cleopatra pay for this. To-morrow we enter Alexandria, and punish her as she deserves."

"No! No!" cried Ventidius, in alarm. "That would be, perhaps, to ruin all. Let us await Cæsar."

"The queen first!" shouted Antony, beside himself with anger, "and Cæsar afterward!"

In vain did his companions expostulate with him. He was firm. On these conditions alone would he resume his leadership. They were finally reluctantly forced to yield; and it was then arranged that on the morrow a certain number of picked men, under the command of Ventidius and Philo, should enter the city in disguise, seize the queen, and bring her before Antony to receive such punishment as her treachery deserved.

When this was agreed upon Antony turned



fiercely toward the city, and drawing his sword from its scabbard, cried exultantly :

“At last, infamous sorceress, I have broken my bonds ! Your spells no longer have power over me. I am free ! The sole love of Antony is the love of war. Antony is happy only with his old soldiers. Yes, my friends, I will lead you once more on to victory. Ah, Cæsar, do you pretend that I have fled ? By Hercules, the lion also seems to fly when he recoils to spring upon his victim ! And I fled, like him, to return the stronger to the charge. Like him, wounded, I have been sleeping in my lair. Tremble, tremble, Cæsar ! The lion is awake. Come ! Come quickly ! I thirst to wash away my shame in thy blood. Down with Cæsar ! Down with the tyrant ! On to Rome ! To Rome !”

Twenty swords leaped flashing into the moonlight, and a mighty shout went up that rent the air, and startled away the vultures that had settled down upon their prey.

“To Rome ! Down with Cæsar ! To Rome !”

After the others had retired to their tents, Antony sat upon the shore late into the night, consulting with Ventidius. After a while the old veteran attempted once more to turn his master



from his project of revenge upon Cleopatra, but Antony continued obdurate and would not listen.

"So be it, then," said Ventidius, with a sigh. "At all events, your chain is at last broken, and your past errors will soon be effaced. You fight for liberty, both your own and that of your countrymen. May the gods of Rome aid you, and banish forever the reign of tyrants!"

As they were about to return to the camp, Antony laid his hand on his old friend's arm, and said, with exceeding seriousness:

"Ventidius, one word before you go. No man was ever more stanch and loyal to another than you have been to me. But I have still one request to make."

"Speak," said Ventidius, earnestly. "My dear lord, I hear but to obey."

"I believe," said Antony, hesitating a little, "that in the approaching conflict we shall conquer, but my hopes may mislead my judgment. If we are defeated, I look to you to see that I do not fall into the hands of the enemy. You—you remember how Straton delivered Brutus. I have his courage, at least, if I have not his virtues. Swear to me that, in the event of the worst, you will plunge your sword into this heart. Swear it!"



Ventidius recoiled, a look of horror upon his face.

“But——”

“Nay,” interrupted Antony, earnestly. “Do not stop to argue. Swear it, my friend, swear it ”

Ventidius paused a moment before replying, drew a deep breath, and then said, quietly :

“I swear it !”

Without another word, they walked side by side back to the tents. The sandy shore was deserted of human presence, and the vultures, with discordant cries, hovered again above their prey, ready to rend with greedy talons.



## CHAPTER XVI.

## QUEEN AND GODDESS.

Perhaps the most superb of all the magnificent palaces of Cleopatra was the Palace of the Ptolemies, on which she had lavished all the resources of her enormous riches, all the wealth of her refined taste. Built in the eastern part of the city of Alexandria, at that time one of the finest cities of the world, and the center of learning and theology, it overlooked the Canopic mouth of the Nile. On one side it communicated directly with the mausoleum which Cleopatra had erected for her own monument, a gigantic pile of sculptured stone, with no visible openings save the door, set far in between two enormous sitting statues, and the broad window above it. Across the front were hieroglyphics setting forth the mighty deeds and extraordinary accomplishments of "the queen that lives forever." On the opposite side of the palace was a spacious garden, across which was a



double row of colonnades connecting with the Temple of Horus.

It was high noon; and at a window in an upper story of the palace, overlooking the garden, stood the queen, arrayed in her most regal robes, with a diadem of jeweled serpents upon her head. To-day in the temple was to take place a most solemn service, an invocation to the gods to ward off the danger that threatened Egypt and its queen from Octavius and his advancing hosts.

The queen was very pale, and her lovely features wore an expression of grief and pain, which was but in small measure due to the reported approach of the hostile Roman legions. Last night she had lowered her pride and sent Charmian to beg an interview from Antony, only to be refused with scorn and contempt. Could she but see Antony, she felt confident that her powers of fascination would win him back again, but to seek him in the midst of his soldiers, who she knew were filled with the bitterest hostility to herself, she did not dare. Although, in her flight from Actium, she had done him the foulest wrong, she loved him more passionately than ever, and she longed with a wild longing for the return of



his love for her. In the presence of the grief she felt at the loss of Antony, the impending doom of her kingdom counted as little or nothing. For the moment, she would have gladly torn off her crown and cast aside her scepter, if by so doing she could have blotted out Actium, and regained her former place in Antony's heart.

Beside the queen stood Serapion, who, as chief augur and royal astrologer, had been summoned from Memphis to read the stars and foretell what would be the result of the struggle between the Egyptians and Romans.

"You are sure, Serapion," said Cleopatra, wearily, "that your predictions are not at fault?"

"Great Queen," replied the old priest. "The gods alone rule. I am but the humble interpreter of their will. Strange portents and prodigies have been frequent of late. The Nile o'erflowed before its accustomed season, and——"

"I know all that," interrupted the queen, impatiently. "You need not repeat it. But where is the storm that you promised to destroy the Roman fleet? Look! There is not a cloud in the changeless blue of the sky."

Serapion approached closer to the window and



pointed to where, low on the horizon, lay a narrow dark streak.

"Look, there," he said. "I have not been deceived. The storm is brewing. Before nightfall it will be upon them."

"If your words prove true, by Horus, you shall be owner of more wealth than your old heart ever dreamt of, even in its youthful days when it beat high with hope. I fear not the army of Cæsar. It is his ships that strike terror to my soul."

And she repeated unconsciously Antony's ever-recurring cry of despair:

"Oh! Actium! Actium!"

As her eyes wander vaguely over the garden below, suddenly she sees a figure, in a long, dark cloak, appear from behind a clump of flowering bushes close to the entrance of the temple. It was only for a moment, and then it vanished again. What was there in this shrouded figure to cause the queen's heart to leap in her bosom, and the blood to rush in crimson torrents to her pale cheek? The eyes of love are keen, however, and in that fleeting vision she had recognized, or fancied that she recognized the man on whom all her thoughts were fixed. But, in another instant,



she impatiently drove away the idea. Had she become so blind to all else that the form of an idle stroller should take on the semblance of Antony?

She turned half angrily away from the window, and said, to Serapion:

“Come! It is time to proceed to the temple.”

But the queen's intuition had not played her false. The man in the dark mantle was indeed Antony. In obedience to his commands of the night before, Ventidius with a small, but trusty band of men, had early in the morning gained access to the city in disguise. There they had learned of the ceremony that was to take place that day, and Ventidius had succeeded in bribing one of the servants of the palace to entrust him with the key of a small gate that opened into the palace gardens. He hoped, by this means, to admit his followers, seize the queen as she went to or returned from the temple, and in the midst of the confusion bear her away before she could be rescued by her guards. The plan might possibly have succeeded, had it not been for Antony himself, who, unable to bear the suspense, and perhaps impelled by a longing to hasten the time when he should look once more upon the haunt-



ing face of his treacherous love, determined to go himself into Alexandria. Poorly dressed in the costume of a boatman, and carrying over his arm a heavy mantle, he managed to pass through the gates of the city. Then, wrapping the mantle about him so as partially to conceal his face, he made his way through the broad, crowded streets, toward the palace. When he came in sight of the great building, chance favored him; for he saw emerging from one of the lower entrances, a woman whom, although she was veiled, he recognized. It was Iras.

Hurrying forward, he cautiously addressed her, and lowered his mantle so that she might see his face. As she recognized who it was that accosted her, the girl uttered a low cry of alarm.

"Hush!" exclaimed Antony, quickly. "Attract no attention, but listen."

"You here, my lord?" faltered Iras.

"Yes. I wish to see the queen."

"But Charmian returned last night——"

"Since last night I have repented my harshness. Take me, good Iras, to where I can see her."

Iras suspected no treachery; she felt only delight that what she knew was her mistress' dear-



est wish was to come to pass. So she led Antony through the temple into the garden, where he concealed himself among the bushes, waiting for Cleopatra's appearance. Iras had told him of the ceremonies in the temple, and that Cleopatra would pass through the garden on her way to participate in them.

It is difficult to say exactly what feeling was predominant in Antony's breast as he waited impatiently for Cleopatra's coming—anger, a thirst for revenge, or eagerness to be once more in her presence, to look once more upon the fatal beauty that had enthralled him and lured him to his ruin. In his restlessness, he moved about from place to place, forgetful that he might be observed and recognized.

At last the lofty doors of the palace were thrown open and the royal procession appeared, wending its way across the garden, between the colonnades, to the temple.

First came a detachment of the queen's body-guard in gleaming armor, led by Kephren, the faithful; then, youths and maidens, bearing garlands of flowers to lay as offerings upon the holy shrines; then the priests in their snowy robes, Serapion last, with footsteps heavy with the



weight of years, yet with body erect. Finally, behind them all, in the midst of her women, proudly, regally, advanced Cleopatra.

The head of the procession had passed into the temple, when, just as the queen was opposite to the clump of bushes behind which Antony was hidden, the latter, carried away with the fierce tumult of his feelings, thrust aside the branches and peered out. Cleopatra, attracted by the rustling sound, glanced aside, and her eyes looked straight into his. She turned white to the lips, and staggered a little as if she would fall. In a moment, however, she seemed to recover herself. She stopped short, and, turning to Charmian, who was on her right, said a few hurried words. The women passed on, and entered the temple, leaving Cleopatra alone. As the last flowing robe vanished within the portals, she advanced a step or two, with both white, jeweled hands pressed against her throbbing heart, and upon Antony's senses fell once again the soft intonation of that music-laden voice.

"Antony! Antony!"

With a crashing sound, he forced his way through the foliage and stood before her. His brow was stern and his lips compressed, as his



gaze rested upon the surpassing grace and loveliness of that most royal woman.

Timidly she raised the lids with their curling lashes and flashed upon him the midnight glory of her eyes. In spite of himself, something of his wrath passed away and a great yearning took its place.

"Forgive! Forgive!" she murmured. "Let my dear lord remove his anger from his handmaiden."

"No," replied Antony, his voice coming hoarse through his unsteady lips, "I wish to hate you in expiation of my crime."

The color flushed warm upon the delicate oval of her cheek, but she still kept fixed upon him the tender pleading of her gaze.

"I am guilty, alas, yes. Be just and curse me, if you will. But, permit me at least to weep at your side. Actium——"

At this unfortunate word, all Antony's anger burst into flame again.

"You, woman," he interrupted violently, "you have filched from me my honor. I was great; you have made me vile, infamous, miserable! To betray me for Cæsar! that hated rival!"



She caught her breath, and two glistening tears rolled down her cheeks.

"I should not have been there if I had betrayed you."

"Why, then, did your vessels cowardly sail away in the very midst of the fight?"

"What is the use of excusing myself?" she replied, with a sob. "You would not believe me."

"What excuse can there be? And to follow her I deserted my soldiers, that invincible army that had been faithful to me through all! For her I did that!"

She stretched out her hands piteously, as if to silence him, but he proceeded inexorably:

"Yes, for you, faithless woman! No! You are right. I would not believe you. And yet, is there aught you could say to justify yourself? To whom did you wish to sacrifice me? To sell me? To Cæsar! To Cæsar! Everything proves it!"

Within the temple were heard the chants of the priests, but these two were deaf to all save the sound of each other's voice.

"Yes," said Cleopatra, her limbs trembling with the emotion she could not control. "Yes, all, all is against me. It was an inexplicable delirium.



I, even I, accuse myself. I do not know what horrible demon took possession of me. I hoped so much from the glory of that day, and I had so much faith in our destiny. In vain did presentiments of evil besiege me. I braved even the counsel of the divine oracle. I was proud to confide my scepter to your fortunes. I had a noble part to play and I wished to fill it well. I was present at the combat and without a tremor. I adored a hero, the happy master of the universe; and by a chance, hitherto unexampled, I, a woman, was a witness of his warlike exploits. How proud I was then! I watched you at a distance. Your voice even, roaring its commands, reached our ears. How handsome I thought you in your golden armor! Then, I had no thought of danger! You seemed to me a being from a heavenly shore, an invincible immortal! No! never was proud warrior or illustrious conqueror grander, more terrible in combat than you!"

She paused, breathless with excitement. Antony's face was flushed. He had forgotten, for the moment, his shame, and remembered only the deeds of prowess he had performed.

"You saw me in the fight?" he said.



"Yes," she answered, noticing with a thrill the change in his manner, "and how full of admiration I was of you! How proud I was that I had courage! War seemed to me a magnificent game. I did not tremble! In the midst of my women, upon the deck of the vessel, splashed by the spray, my hair floating upon the wind, I mingled my voice with the cries of the combatants and reveled in delight as at some great feast. We drank to Neptune, to Jupiter Sator, and to Mars, and we flung our cups of gold into the waves. Joyfully we went from prow to stern. At each libation, the cups were thrown over, for we sought, by rich offerings, to purchase the favor of the sea and its deities."

"You asked of the gods the success of our arms," interrupted Antony, "and you shared our dangers? You were filled with admiration for me, did you say? Then, why did you leave me? What demon impelled you to do so? Speak!"

She was fighting a battle herself, now, fighting for tremendous stakes, and with no weapons save her own wit. Eagerly, thirstily, she pleaded her cause, her exquisite voice now rising in passionate entreaty, now softening into murmurs of tenderness.



“It was fatality! Listen! Before us commenced the carnage. Flaming brands swept by us on the water; on all sides shot up the flames. It was a frightful spectacle in its confused horror—those ships struggling furiously upon the water; on the shore, the motionless army watching the fight, trying to judge of the varying fortunes through the smoke, the savage cries, the hissing of the arrows and javelins, the blood which crimsoned the blue of the waves—— Oh! it was too much for even the pride of a queen! I could no longer see you—my reason was tottering, when a fatal chance came to complete my agony. One of my sailors was wounded and fell upon the deck of the vessel, his blood pouring forth and staining the deck. I approached him. Ye gods! he resembled you! I do not know what horrible presage of evil seized me, but, as I saw death upon that noble face, I suddenly thought that, like that sailor, you might in your turn perish in the fight. You, dead! You die for Cæsar! You! Misery! Madness! When one can live for love, to die for a vain name! I confess that, in that wretched moment, I knew nothing of pride, of courage, of glory, of that false embalming in memory that is called history;



your enemies to me appeared as criminals. I cursed your glory and your mad bravery. War seemed to me now stupid and cowardly. I perceived in a sacred duty only frightful dangers for a being I adored. I forgot your exploits and your renown, and Cæsar, and empire, and my Egypt, and Rome! I saw nothing save the spilling of your blood, the sword suspended above your head! And all means seemed to me good, in that horrible dream, to stop that bloodshed and to turn aside that sword. Trembling, mad with fear, I gave the signal to hoist the sails. You would see my flight and follow me—I knew it. It was so sudden that I calculated nothing, neither your sorrow nor your shame. I did not think that I was bringing dishonor upon you, I thought only that I was saving you. To-day I understand, and my remorse overwhelms me. Oh! if death could justify me in your eyes! See, Antony, I offer my breast to your dagger! Strike! You will love me, perhaps, after you have struck me! Strike, my lord, my love, my king!”

She ceased. The tears were streaming down her cheeks, and her voice died away as if choked in its utterance. And Antony? Could this be



the man who, the previous night, had vowed vengeance upon Cleopatra, who, only an hour or two before, had entered that garden wild with anger against her—this man who now, with a passionate cry, drew her close into his arms, and looked with deepest love upon the face of her whom he had stigmatized as traitress.

“And I accused you! It is I who am the guilty one.”

“Forgive! Forgive!” she sobbed.

“Egypt,” he murmured, ardently, “it is true that I fled before Octavius, and he has taken from me the empire. True! But this moment, this moment alone has restored to me all that he conquered from me, all that I have lost. Let him come, this conqueror! In my turn, I brave him! Your chance successes, young and prudent Cæsar, I do not envy. No! I love better my reverses. Keep the world, and leave me Cleopatra!”

She glanced shyly up at him, smiling through her tears.

“You no longer hate me, then?”

“Hate! You alone are all to me, and I fear nothing when I trust you. For this is my secret,



my Cleopatra. I have only one enemy, and his name is doubt; doubt is the fatal enemy against which I have no defense. I fear doubt more than triumphant Cæsar. When I doubt you, all my courage expires. Why fight then? I no longer wish for empire. I forget my fame, my glory, my battle flags, my old soldiers. All that I care for is to put forever to flight this insupportable doubt."

"And I will force you to believe in me forever!" she cried, thrilling with happiness at having won the battle and regained her lover, while the thought went flashing through her mind: "Better that he should be shamed and here, than victorious in Rome and with Octavia."

But, suddenly, the grating of a key in the lock of a door in the wall just behind them startled them both. She sprang from his embrace. The door opened cautiously and Ventidius appeared peering into the garden. Behind him were a score or so of men. As soon as the old soldier caught sight of his master and the queen, he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and rushed forward, followed by the others.

"So, general," he exclaimed, "you have fore-stalled us and trapped the bird yourself. Seize



her, men, and carry her away before the alarm can be given."

But, before one of them could move a step to obey the order, Antony sprang in front of the queen. With his eyes flashing fire, he drew his dagger from his belt.

"Whoever lays a hand upon her, dies," he cried. "Back, on your lives! Back, I say, back!"

The men shrank away and looked at one another in bewilderment. Ventidius' rugged face flushed darkly.

"What mean you, noble Antony?" he said. "Was it not your own orders——"

"What my orders may have been, matters but little," retorted Antony, angrily. "I have found out my mistake. Cleopatra is true to me and my love."

At these words, Ventidius could not contain himself.

"Love!" he burst forth. "Oh! touching spectacle! Oh! worthy, noble love! So, you have pardoned the one who would carry you away again into slavery!"

"Silence!" began Antony; but the queen moved haughtily forward, and stood face to face with the one she knew to be her most inveterate



enemy. How she hated this Roman who had dared more than once to oppose her, and whose influence over Antony she knew and feared!

"Let him speak," she said, uprearing her head haughtily. "I will answer his accusations."

Honest Ventidius was in no whit deterred from his purpose. He realized that the struggle was an unequal one, that the prize was already firmly held in Cleopatra's grasp, that their general was now irrevocably lost to his soldiers, but, nevertheless, he determined to fight to the last gasp.

"Ay! you may well say accusations," he retorted. "You have betrayed Antony! You have signed a treaty to deliver him into the hands of Cæsar. Cæsar himself boasts of the fact."

Antony started. For the moment he had forgotten what had been told him the night before. But the queen smiled disdainfully.

"I know Cæsar and his character too well to sign a treaty with him," she said. "It is false!"

"Words! Words!" said Ventidius. "Remember Actium, Antony, remember Actium."

"There, I brave your malice. Antony knows now why I fled. 'Twas fear for him. Ah! my dear lord, would that I had been a man not to have known that fear, for then these Romans,



who envy me your love, and seek to take it from me, would not have envied me your friendship."

"But Cæsar!" exclaimed Ventidius, feeling more and more that his direct honesty was no match for her wiles. "Answer! Have you not agreed with him to deliver Antony?"

"To you I disdain reply! But," turning to Antony, "that his slanderous tongue may no longer poison your ears, to you, noble Antony, I tell all. His accusation has this much truth. By a messenger Octavius has sent me this. If I could have borne life and greatness away from you, this would have given me the means."

As she spoke, she drew from the folds of her robe a small roll of papyrus and extended it to Antony.

"Beware, general," cried Ventidius. "'Tis but another ruse!"

If a look had power to kill, the old veteran would have fallen dead at the feet of the Egyptian queen. But Antony paid no attention to the warning. He had unrolled the papyrus, and was eagerly perusing the writing.

"By Hercules!" he muttered. "It is Octavius' hand. Look, Ventidius! Look, Eros! He offers here Egypt, with all Syria joined to it as



a present, if she will forsake my fortunes and join with him against me. And your answer?"

Cleopatra smiled.

"My answer! There was none. Beneath the walls, upon the sands, lies the body of the messenger, pierced with a hundred wounds. To-night the vultures will feed upon the carrion. Antony! Antony! For this vain diadem, for the safety of Egypt, I would have betrayed a hundred kings, but you, never! You I loved!"

"Queen of my soul, I believe you!" cried Antony, tearing the message of Cæsar into bits. "And so perish forever all calumnies against you!"

Upon Ventidius the queen flashed one quick glance of ferocious, savage joy. The old soldier shrank back sorrowfully—defeated.

Once more from the temple burst forth in loud refrain the holy chants:

Isis, Osiris, Horus!  
Horus, Isis, Osiris!  
Osiris, Horus, Isis!

This time Cleopatra started, and raised her eyes quickly to the sky. Above the high wall of the garden loomed up a cloud of inky blackness. In another moment it would obscure the brilliancy of the sun.



"Come with me," she said to Antony, "and let us invoke together the aid of the gods against our common enemy."

With her glittering robes trailing behind her she swept on into the temple. Antony followed.

With a heavy sigh Ventidius turned to his comrades.

"There is naught to do now," he said, mournfully, "save to await the end."

The vast temple was thronged. All Alexandria had hastened there to beseech the gods of Egypt to save the city from the Roman invasion. Before all the shrines, which were heaped with votive offerings, burned flaming lights. Close to the altar of Horus, the titular deity of the temple, stood the venerable form of Serapion.

Still followed by Antony, as if he were some captive in her triumphal procession, which indeed he was, Cleopatra moved forward between the double row of guards, to where a throne had been prepared for her. Mounting the steps of the platform, covered with cloths of gold and scarlet, she seated herself in the sumptuous chair. Antony remained below.

In high, sweet strains rolled the solemn chorus :

Isis, Osiris, Horus!



Then, as the last notes died away, Cleopatra majestically arose to her feet. Instantly a hush fell over the whole vast assemblage.

“My people,” she said, in her clear, vibrant voice, that reached the furthestmost corners of the immense place, “the invader, ere to-morrow’s sun, will be at our gates. People, soldiers, priests, in this the hour of their danger rally to the defense of your queen and your country! What! shall the insulting Cæsar lay his envious grasp upon this our Alexandria? Shall the daughter of the Ptolemies be chained to his triumphal car? Never! Never! Never! You, all of you, my countrymen, rally round me, and crouch ready to fly at the throat of the presumptuous Roman! Aid my hope! Accomplish, at last, a divine duty! Defend with me this cherished city! Oh, I will teach you the love of country—that most holy of love. Our country is the place where are set the altars of our gods, where our children have been born, where the venerated ashes of our ancestors repose. And to this noble love no one can be faithless. If we are banished from the land we adore, we dream only of her in our exile, and when grim Death lays his cold hand upon us we turn our dim eyes toward our country, praying



that our bones, at least, may rest in her sacred soil. Up, my people! up about me! Give to the nations of the world an example to follow! Defend your tombs!"

In response to her appeal a mighty roar went up from the populace:

"Cleopatra! Egypt! Egypt! Cleopatra!"

But above the tumult the queen's quick ear caught a low rumble she knew to be thunder. The storm must now be close upon them. She raised her hand for silence. Then, as the shouts died away, she lifted her white arms in the air and turned her face upward to the heavens. For an instant all was still, and then she cried, in thrilling tones:

"Oh, Holy Isis, sacred mother, mistress of heaven, eye of the sun, regent of the gods! Oh, Osiris, spouse of Isis, son of Ra, judge of Hades! Oh, Horus, divine hawk-eyed one, who didst suckle at the breast of Isis! Hear me now! All powerful gods, I invoke your aid! Bend your ears to the appeal of her who is your suppliant! Cast down, from your lofty heights, your starry eyes upon this land of Egypt that has always been your well-beloved! Not as woman do I raise my voice and call upon ye—not as queen, even,



but as Evergetes, your sister goddess. Oh, divine ones, if but for a moment acknowledge me as one of ye—for a single hour lend me the eternal crown! Isis, hear me! Osiris, hear me! Horus, hear me! Lend me the armaments of heaven to drive the insulting hosts from off my shores! Send Typhon, the ruler of the tempest, with his invincible weapons, the lightning and the thunder, to strike this bastard Cæsar and his legions forever from the face of the earth! Hurl against them your thunderbolts! Strike them with your flaming lightning! Crush them! Slay them! Annihilate them! Let the waters overwhelm them! Let the sands of the desert be their winding sheet! Ye gods, hear my voice! Grant the petition of your sister, Evergetes! Isis, Osiris, Horus! Horus! Isis! Osiris! Osiris! Horus! Isis!”

Her passion-fraught pleadings died away in silence. With her arms still raised she stood, magnificent, superb, before the awed and breathless people.

Then suddenly, as if indeed the gods had heard and answered her invocation, there was a blinding flash of lightning, followed by a terrific peal of thunder. One great shriek went up, and then



the whole vast multitude fell prone upon their faces before the majestic figure of their queen and goddess. Antony, who himself was strangely troubled, and the priests before the shrines, alone remained standing.

The wind howled terrifically about the sacred edifice, the cataracts of the clouds were poured forth upon the earth and the elements raged with awe-inspiring fury.

Then, as suddenly as it had arisen, the storm was allayed, and in place of the shrieking tempest intense quiet reigned.

Cleopatra made a sign to Serapion, and once more the rich music of the sacred hymn rolled through the temple.

Slowly the queen descended the steps of the throne, and held out her hand to Antony.

Her face was very pale, but about her lips played a mysterious, bewildering smile.

"Oh, wonder of the world!" murmured Antony, beneath his breath.

Hand in hand they passed, amid the chants of the priests and through aisles of prostrate forms, out of the temple, by Ventidius and his companions, who were huddled together in the portico,



across the dripping garden and into the perfumed splendors of the palace.

Once more the will of the Queen of Egypt is triumphant.

Let to-morrow bring forth what it will! To-night belongs to love. They will revel in the happiness of living, and forget all else save that they are together.

What matters shame, even? Is the universe worth one kiss from the lips of Cleopatra?



## CHAPTER XVII.

## ALL IS LOST!

It is the hour just before the dawn, the second day after the ceremonies in the temple. The city is asleep and the shadows lay dark in the gardens of the palace of the Ptolemies. Early as it is, a man is pacing to and fro under the colonades. Now and then he glances impatiently up at the dark walls of the palace.

At last what he has been watching for appears. A door opens, and a young girl comes out upon the platform. Down the steps she hastens, and peers into the garden. Then, seeing the man, she utters a low cry, and hurries toward him.

"Pharon! Pharon! Is it really you?"

"My faithful Iras. I knew that you would come, undeserving as I am of a single thought."

"No, say not that, Pharon. I will not pretend to misunderstand you. We are not masters of our hearts. Else would you not love the queen, nor I you."



He sighed, and nervously plucked the leaves from a low bush near him.

"You received my message?"

"Yes. Uncle told me last night of your arrival, and that you would be here just before dawn. Oh, Pharon, you were safe in Greece. Why have you returned to this fated city?"

"Fated, indeed! But can you ask? The queen was in danger."

She lowered her eyes, with an expression of pain.

"But what can you do?"

"I know not. Sometimes the lowliest can serve the highest. Tell me, how is the queen?"

"Ah!" she replied, bitterly. "It is for that you have sent for me! I am nothing to you. Nay," with a quick revulsion of feeling, "I meant not that. The queen is well. Is not Antony here?"

The last words contained a bit of malice that not even the gentle Iras could forbear giving utterance to.

"Antony! True. And yet Antony is no longer anything. At the battle of Actium set the star of his destiny. Ah, god of foolish loves, how strange are thy caprices! Thou didst choose the proudest and most courageous of men, and didst



lure him to his ruin ; then thou didst awaken the wretched slave, and didst place the hero's courage in his miserable breast. And yet, we both loved the same woman, our passion was born of the same flame. Oh, Antony ! Antony ! even in thy fall I envy thee thy lot."

"Hark !" interrupted Iras, suddenly. "What is that noise ?"

"What noise ?"

"Do you not hear a confused murmur within the city ?"

He listened for a moment, and then exclaimed, excitedly :

"Yes, yes, it is like the clamor of voices."

And, impelled by the same fear, they both turned and rushed up the steps to the platform, where they could see above the high wall of the garden.

The dawn was already breaking. The east was aflame with the glowing colors that heralded the sun's approach. But see, through the sycamores, those glancing lights ! Is it running water kissed by the first rays of the sun ? No ! it is the glitter of Roman spears and cuirasses ! Louder and louder grows the noise—cries and the trampling



of hurrying feet. A voice in the square, before the palace, shrieks :

“We are betrayed! Cæsar’s army is within our gates!”

“Quick! Quick!” cried Pharon. “Warn the queen!”

But his companion had already vanished. He turned and rushed blindly into the palace. There was no sign of Iras, but already all was in commotion. Pharon hurried to a window and looked out upon the square. It was too late. Already the Roman legions were surrounding the palace.

Where were the gods who but two days before had promised the annihilation of Cæsar and his army? Disgusted at Antony’s weakness, and without Ventidius, who had remained in Alexandria with his master in the vain hope of inducing him to return to the camp, Antony’s legions have surrendered, and treachery has opened the gates of Alexandria to victorious Cæsar. All is lost—even honor.

And where is Antony, to whose mad infatuation all these disasters are due?

Stunned, horrified, he has just heard from Ventidius the direful news. All hope is gone! To struggle would be folly.



He turned his haggard eyes upon his old friend, as if to seek advice from him.

Ventidius shook his head sadly, and groaned aloud:

"It is useless, general. There is no escape."

"But the queen, Ventidius, the queen! Cleopatra!"

Scarcely were the words uttered when just outside arose a wailing cry:

"The queen is dead! The queen is dead!"

With one bound Antony was in the corridor, and seized by his tunic one of the slaves who went flying by.

"What is it? Speak! The queen?"

"Alas, my lord," said the man, who was trembling with fear and horror. "The queen is no more. Before her women could prevent her, she plunged her dagger in her heart."

White as ashes, Antony released him and staggered back to the side of Ventidius.

"So, my old friend," he gasped, "all is over. She is dead, and——"

"General," cried Ventidius, "there is yet a chance of escape. Quick! would you be taken?"

"Yes, but not alive. Do your duty, old soldier. The hour has come."



And he pointed significantly at the sword which Ventidius wore at his side.

The veteran understood, and his lips twitched convulsively.

"What! I—I—" he faltered. "I pierce that heart, that even the weapons of the enemy have always respected!"

"Ventidius, you swore it!" said Antony, solemnly.

Slowly the old man drew his sword.

"Strike!"

"No! No! I cannot."

"Strike, I say!"

Suddenly a strange expression, almost a smile, lit up the rugged, scarred features.

"Farewell, my emperor!" he said. "Nay, that is too cold a word—my friend. Now turn away your head. I cannot strike while your eyes are upon me."

Antony obeyed, baring his breast as he did so.

Then Ventidius lifted high the sword, and plunging it, not into the breast of Antony, but into his own, fell heavily to the ground.

With a cry of horror, Antony sank down beside him and raised his head. The eyes, which were



already growing dim, looked up at him with a devotion that not even Death could conquer.

"Thus," he gasped, "do I escape the grief of killing Mark Antony."

His head fell back. The brave, loyal spirit had fled.

Very gently did Antony release his hold.

"Farewell, old friend," he murmured. "That is the first time you have failed to keep your word. Oh, Brutus, your conqueror, unworthy of that name, is forced to envy you. Straton, Cleopatra, Ventidius, I follow your example. Rome, pardon me! I might have saved you!"

Then he drew the sword from Ventidius' bosom, plunged it in his own, and fell, with a groan, to the floor.

Scarcely had he done so when the door was burst open and Kephren, followed by two burly slaves, rushed into the room.

"Quick! Quick, my lord!" cried Kephren.

Then, as he saw the two bodies lying upon the ground, he started back with an exclamation of affright.

But Antony moved and raised himself on one elbow.



"Who is it calls?" he said, faintly. "Kephren! What, has cruel death refused my soul?"

The captain of the guard knelt down by his side.

"Oh, my lord!" he said. "What has induced you to do this deed? The queen has sent for you."

"The queen! When saw you the queen?"

"But now, my lord. I come from her."

"But Cleopatra is dead."

"Not so, my lord. The report was false. The queen has fled with her women to the monument, where she proposes to barricade herself against Cæsar."

"Not dead! Not dead! Bear me to her."

"Yes," exclaimed Kephren, "there is still time, perchance. The Romans have not yet penetrated the palace."

As he spoke, he motioned to the two slaves, who stooped and raised Antony in their arms. Then, followed by Kephren, they carried him from the room.

Alone and forgotten lay the body of Ventidius.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE LAST KISS OF ALL.

In an upper chamber of the monument was Cleopatra, attended by Kephren, Charmian, and Iras, all that now remained to her of that vast retinue that, but yesterday, had been obedient to her nod.

It was a large room, with walls of black and red granite, brilliantly lighted from above, by lamps set in the form of a crescent, with numerous lesser lights representing the starry satellites of the queen of the night. On either side of the broad doorway were enormous statues of the two Rameses, who, in their calm grandeur, looked down with placid, unruffled eyes upon the doom of Egypt and the fall of its queen.

Piled in one corner of the apartment were treasures of all descriptions, gold and silver plate, jewels and costly raiment; and among them the royal mantle, crown and scepter.

In a curtained recess, upon Cleopatra's golden



bed, lay Antony, asleep. Kephren and his slaves had been in time, and, before the invasion of the palace by Cæsar's troops, had managed to carry him to the monument, where the blood from his wound had been staunched, and he himself tenderly cared for by the queen and her maidens.

Of little avail, however, had been the elaborate barricades, the bolts and bars and chains. It took but a short time for the Romans to force an entrance. Guards were stationed before the doors of the chamber, although the privacy of the queen had not as yet been molested.

Back and forth, upon the tessellated marble of the floor, paced Cleopatra, the silken masses of her hair unbound and disheveled, and the dusky splendor of her eyes dimmed with weeping. Now and then she would pause near the gorgeous bed and bend over the prostrate form of Antony, as if to satisfy herself that he was still breathing.

Pale and weary, Charmian and Iras watched her restless movements, recognizing their powerlessness to do or say aught to comfort her. Before the door, with drawn sword, stood Kephren, the sad mockery of a guard, for what could even his giant strength avail against the numbers of Cæsar's legions.



The stillness of the grave reigned in that vaulted chamber. No noise or tumult of the city could penetrate those thick walls. Cæsar was master of Alexandria, and the proud daughter of the Ptolemies was a prisoner in the superb pile she had built for her tomb.

Cleopatra's breast was racked with a hundred conflicting emotions. Was this rich realm, over which she had reigned so long in limitless power, to be taken from her? Was she, whose ambition it had been to one day rule at the Capitol, to follow, a prisoner and in chains, the victorious chariot of Octavius as it rolled through the streets of Rome? Never! But still her chief thought was how to save Antony. Even now, could he escape, perchance it was not too late to recover his lost supremacy, and his supremacy meant her own, and the freeing of Egypt from the galling yoke of the invader. Once she started to awake Antony to consult with him, but she refrained, thinking:

"'Tis useless! Let him sleep. Oblivion is best. He might, perchance, awake but to fall into a sleep from which there would be no waking."

But how, how could she save him. Oh! this Octavius! Were it not for him, all would be



well. Were it not for him? As she thought this, a desperate project formed itself in her mind. Yet, why should it not succeed? Her astuteness had before this been more than a match for infinitely more brilliant men than this young Octavius, whose successes had been due far more to chance than to his own ability. Had she lost any of the cleverness, any of the beauty, any of the fascination that had enslaved the great Cæsar? Could she but induce this man, who held her destiny and that of Antony in his hands, to place himself in her power, could she but lull to rest his suspicions for one brief interval, then——

“Iras!” she called, stopping suddenly, with cheeks crimsoning with excitement.

The girl started, and hurried to her side.

“Yes, royal mistress, I am here.”

“Faithful Iras, go seek Octavius. The guards will let you pass. Say that Cleopatra craves immediate audience with him. Ask it as a right, not as a boon granted through pity. No tears, Iras, no tears! Mark Antony would scorn all tears. Tell him Cleopatra herself wishes to see him.”

“Your will shall be obeyed.”

She turned, but just as she was about to pass through the door, Cleopatra called her back.



"Iras," she whispered, "if he be inclined not to come, then weep, Iras, weep!"

When the girl had vanished on her mission, Cleopatra approached Kephren, who still stood motionless at his post.

"Kephren," she said, looking him full in the eye, "you have always been faithful to me. Will you be faithful still?"

"Others may command, but Cleopatra alone I obey."

"Would that it were in my power to reward you," she said, with a sad smile. "I shall soon put your loyalty to a severe test."

She then washed her tear-stained face, and, with Charmian's aid, proceeded to array herself in her most magnificent robes.

Scarcely was she ready, when Iras returned with the news that Octavius granted the audience and would be there immediately.

"Quick, Charmian," cried the queen, excitedly, "draw the curtains before the recess where Antony lies. And, Kephren, approach, and remember well my words. Conceal yourself behind the tapestry there—there, behind that couch," pointing to a low divan, strewn with silken cushions. "There will I try to make Octavius sit. Draw



your sword, and when I raise this fan to my lips, fell him with a blow as you would an ox, and so free Egypt from her enemy."

Without a word, Kephren strode to the tapestry and hid himself behind the heavy folds.

Cleopatra threw herself down in a negligent attitude upon the couch.

"I will win him!" she muttered. "I will win him!"

It was not many minutes before the door was thrown open, and a soldier announced:

"Cæsar!"

Octavius entered, followed by his officers.

"The queen?" he asked of Charmian, who was nearest the door.

"I am the queen," replied Cleopatra, raising her lovely eyes, with a sad smile, to the face of her conqueror.

Octavius approached the couch, and Cleopatra arose and knelt before him.

"Nay, madam, you must not kneel," said Octavius coldly, assisting her to her feet. "You wished to see me, and I am here."

"Yes, great Cæsar," she replied. "I sent to you to crave mercy for him, for Antony."

Octavius' face grew dark.



"No mercy can be shown to traitors," he said, harshly.

In vain did Cleopatra plead, in vain did she lavish upon him flatteries and blandishments. Her beauty left him unmoved, her fascinations made no impression upon his cold blood. The only emotion aroused in him was a sort of cold curiosity to see the woman who had enticed his sister's husband from his lawful place.

At last, in desperation, and in spite of the presence of the officers, whom she had been unable to induce Cæsar to send away, Cleopatra was about to give the fatal signal, when, suddenly, the silken curtains, which concealed the bed upon which Antony lay, were thrust furiously aside, and Antony himself appeared, white with fury.

He made a rush toward Octavius, but the latter started back, and his officers at once closed about him.

"You see," cried Antony, scornfully, "you see, my queen, that, wounded as I am, he fears me still! Great conqueror, hail! You—you a conqueror? It is not Octavius that has conquered Antony, but Rome. Your very officers know it! Your very officers despise you, tyrant, coward, slave!"



As Antony poured forth his superb indignation, Octavius' color forsook him, and he quailed before this man who, beaten and dying as he was, was still his superior.

Cleopatra had thrown her arms about her lover's neck, and was seeking to quiet him.

Suddenly, the blaze of wrath faded from Antony's face, and a dark, crimson stain appeared upon the white of his tunic.

Cleopatra uttered a shriek of horror.

In answer to her cry, Kephren, forgetful of all, came running from behind the tapestry. He cast aside his sword, and catching Antony in his arms, just as he was about to fall, laid him down upon the cushions of the couch. Cleopatra, in an agony of fear, flung herself on her knees beside him.

"Seize that man, and carry him away!" said Octavius, in a low voice.

Before Kephren was conscious of what they were about to do, four of the officers had seized him in a firm grasp.

"Away with him!"

And in spite of his struggles, the Queen of Egypt's last servitor was dragged from her presence.



One of the officers advanced and picked up the sword.

"So!" said Octavius, with a cold, ironical smile, "the queen demanded audience of Cæsar to assassinate him!"

Cleopatra sprang to her feet and faced him.

"Yes," she cried, wildly, "and, had the gods not deserted me, you would be lying now dead at my feet!"

"Cæsar's hour has not come. I shall see you yet, treacherous queen, figure in my triumph, the sport of the Roman crowd."

"Then, it will be my dead body, never Cleopatra living."

"You cannot escape Cæsar. Cæsar is master here. Proculeius, guard this woman, and your life shall answer for it if she does harm to herself, either with the fire of poison, or the steel of a dagger."

And with a harsh glance at the queen, and the recumbent form of Antony, he turned and strode from the apartment, followed by his officers, the one whom he had addressed as Proculeius and one other remaining on guard just outside the open door.

Pale with passion and with heaving breast,



Cleopatra gazed after him. A moan from Antony recalled her to herself. With a low cry, she turned and threw herself down on the couch beside him.

"My love! My love!"

Charmian and Iras approached and attempted to raise her, but she waved them away.

"No! Leave me alone with him."

"Egypt, I am dying!" issued in faint syllables from Antony's lips.

"No! No!" she shrieked. "Oh, ye gods, who have wreaked your cruelty upon me, now be kind, and give me back his fleeting life!"

"Grieve not, my Cleopatra," he murmured, raising his heavy eyes to the beautiful face he loved so well. "Blessed be fortune that permits me to die near you! Oh! Cleopatra, my last thought is for you! I am cold—come closer to me."

She wound her arms about him, and pressed her face close to his.

"Oh! fatal destiny!" she moaned. "My love, we loved each other too much. The gods were jealous of us."

"I do not accuse the gods—fate—had I the choice, I would still take the life they have given



me—it has been a glorious one—a Roman, I have had for a conqueror no other than a Roman. I have lived, loving and loved by you. In death I am still happy. I am near you. Happy! Do not grieve for me. All Cæsar has is as naught to this. I die for you, and in your arms. Kiss me, my sweet!”

She pressed, in a long passionate kiss, her warm lips to his already cold in death, and, in that kiss, Antony's soul sped to the Great Unknown.

Suddenly, the queen raised her head, and gazed wildly upon the ashen face. Then, she shrieked aloud:

“Dead! Dead!”

Charmian and Iras hurried to her side. Iras cast her arms about the queen, while Charmian bent over and closed the staring eyes of Antony.

The queen seemed frozen into marble, so white and rigid was she. Finally, the pale lips moved, and in low, heart-breaking accents, she murmured:

“What! His eyes are closed, closed forever! My Antony! I will soon follow you, and yet—and yet, it is frightful, it is cruel for you to go first. The half of my soul is torn away. To



love what can no longer love, to feel cold a hand which burned you when living, to seek in vain a heart—— Ah! it is too much! Charmian! Iras! Why do I not die? Oh! Isis, Queen of Heaven! hear my prayer! Take me to Antony! Thou didst once mourn thy husband! Watch over mine till I come!”

“Madam,” said Charmian, “Queen, Royal Egypt, be comforted! He bade you not to grieve.”

Cleopatra arose to her feet.

“Yes,” she cried, almost exultantly. “He bade me not to grieve, nor will these eyes shed one tear. I have not loved a Roman without knowing what is becoming in his wife. For I was his wife! Pale, bloodless Octavia never deserved the name! Who dare dispute it with me? Oh! Death, thou, who hast taken him from me, be proud of thy prey! Never was there a greater, more illustrious warrior. Powerful in the senate, in the army, and in Rome; in Rome, where all are great, he was the greatest. He marched proudly, surrounded by an escort of kings, for the entire universe lived only to do his bidding. And yet, all this grandeur, brilliancy, and power were as nothing in his eyes. He sought in life



something more precious still. When he understood love, he despised glory. A conqueror, he cast down his arms, proud that the world should one day say: 'Antony knew how to love!' Oh! Cæsar, it was not ambition that prompted his desire to rule over land and sea, it was that he might lay down the universe as an offering to love!"

She stood, drawn up to her full height, her eyes flashing with pride in her lover and that she had been the object of his love. Never had she looked more beautiful, never more regal.

She was startled from her ecstasy by the entrance of Proculeius.

"Queen," he said, respectfully, "it is Cæsar's will that you go with him to Rome to-night."

"To Rome!" she cried. "Never!"

"Madam," he said, sorrowfully, "I but fulfill my duty."

" 'Tis well. Go!"

The soldier bowed, and retired.

"To Rome!" whispered Charmian, in horror.  
"To Rome!"

"Fear nothing, good Charmian," said Cleopatra.  
"I have yet time. Lend me your dagger."



"Alas, madam, I have none."

"You have none, girl! Nor I! Nor I!"

"Be calm, dear mistress."

But the queen was frantic with despair.

"No dagger! No weapon of any sort! Fool that I was to forget! Can nothing save me from my fate? Must I follow Cæsar, and enter Rome behind his chariot? Ah, I can see it all! For escort I shall have triumphing soldiers. The whole length of the way I shall be pursued by the insulting cries of the rabble. I shall pass before the house of Octavia, who will follow me with her eyes, and her glance, usually so cold, will burn, for the first time, with pleasure. To go to Rome! To go to Rome, conquered and disarmed! Oh, shades of the Ptolemies, come to my aid! Hide me! Not a single friend comes to save me! Not one understands that I long to die. Not one. Not one!"

But, even as she spoke, there was one close at hand, one who had longed to do her service, and whose opportunity at last had come.

Before the open door appeared a man of slender figure and clear-cut features, a man dressed in the robes of a priest of Ammon. In his hands he carried a basket filled with figs and lotus-flowers.



"Halt!" cried Proculeius. "What is your business?"

"The queen!" he answered, shortly.

Cleopatra heard the loud answer, and recognized the voice.

"It is Pharon," she whispered to herself, with a sudden revulsion from despair to hope. "It is Pharon. I am saved!"

"It is Pharon!" thought Iras, with a shiver of dread. "He is lost!"

Breathlessly the two women awaited the result.

"What do you wish, priest?" continued Proculeius. "What is your name?"

"I am a servant of the holy temple of Ammon," replied Pharon, calmly. "Every evening, after the sacrifices, the fruits of the season are offered to the queen. It is the custom of the temple, and I come to-day to fulfill my duty."

Proculeius, half doubting, stretched out his hand to take the basket; but the pretended priest started back with an assumption of horror.

"What!" he cried, "touch the sacred fruit! Roman, do you wish by a vain sacrilege to shock Egypt and render yourself odious? You will not rule this land save by respecting its gods. Of such



respect Cæsar would be the first to furnish you an example. He knows that here even the throne is second to religion.

Proculeius hesitated a moment. His suspicions were allayed, for he knew how strict were the Egyptians in their observance of all religious rites. Finally he said:

“Enter, then! But hasten to fulfill your duty.”

With slow steps, Pharon approached to where the queen stood, supported on either side by Charmian and Iras. He knelt before her and placed the basket containing the figs at her feet.

“Queen,” he said, in a low voice, “Rome awaits you. You are to depart this evening, unless—unless you prefer a prompt and noble death. Are you afraid of death?”

“I?” she replied, in the same tone, not a muscle of her face changing, to betray to the watchful Proculeius the emotion with which she was devoured. “I am afraid of shame. Is it a dagger?”

“A dagger? No! Those insolent witnesses would seize you before you could strike.”

“Poison?”

“The soul long rebels against poison. You would suffer too much, and you would die less beautiful. Serpents are hidden beneath this fruit—



the asps of the Nile. Their venom will make you drowsy with the last sleep, without distortion, without suffering."

"Must she die?" murmured Charmian. "Is there no hope?"

Cleopatra motioned Pharon to place the basket near the couch upon which Antony lay.

Then she extended to him her white hand. He bent over, and his lips touched it, lingeringly, passionately. He caught his breath with a shuddering gasp, and, turning, hurried away, without one glance at the golden-haired girl, whose soft lips trembled in a grievous quiver and whose blue eyes filled with tears.

"So!" said Cleopatra, her face illumined with a radiance that was almost supernatural. "Let us give to my death an aspect of triumph. Charmian, the crown and the royal mantle!"

Charmian brought from the heap of treasure the purple mantle, heavy with embroidery, and the sparkling diadem of Egypt.

With Iras' aid, she attached the mantle to the shoulders of the queen and placed the crown upon her royal head.

Proculeius looked on at the proceedings without



surprise. He thought that Cleopatra was preparing to accompany Cæsar in a style befitting her rank.

“Let Octavius now come to seek his prey. He will find her awaiting him. Farewell, my good Charmian. Farewell, sweet Iras! Nay, restrain your tears. My death shall be yours, if you so will it.”

As if advancing to some grand ceremonial, she crossed the room, with regal step, to the couch where Antony lay. There was not a tremor, not a fear in her heart. Without a shadow of regret would she say farewell to life, which had been to her one of boundless power and unbridled pleasures. What use to prolong an existence of which she had tasted all the honey? What remained for her to do save to fulfill her promise and join her lover. That was the only happiness now permitted to her. The serpent of the Nile would deliver the Queen of Egypt from her conquerors. She would die free and great.

She sank down upon the couch, and, with a smile, looked upon the calm face before her. Then she plunged her hand into the basket of figs and drew forth one of the asps. Baring her breast, she laid it upon the fair, white flesh.



The sting is sharp. Already the poison steals through her veins.

"Cæsar," she murmured, "do thy worst. Part us now, if thou canst! A last kiss, my Antony, the last of so many kisses. Isis, bear my soul to his. Antony, I come! I come!"

The beautiful head sank down until her lips rested upon his. There was a slight shiver of the limbs, and then all was still.

The Empire of the World belonged now to Octavius. The last to resist Rome was no more.

The Great Queen was dead!

THE END.



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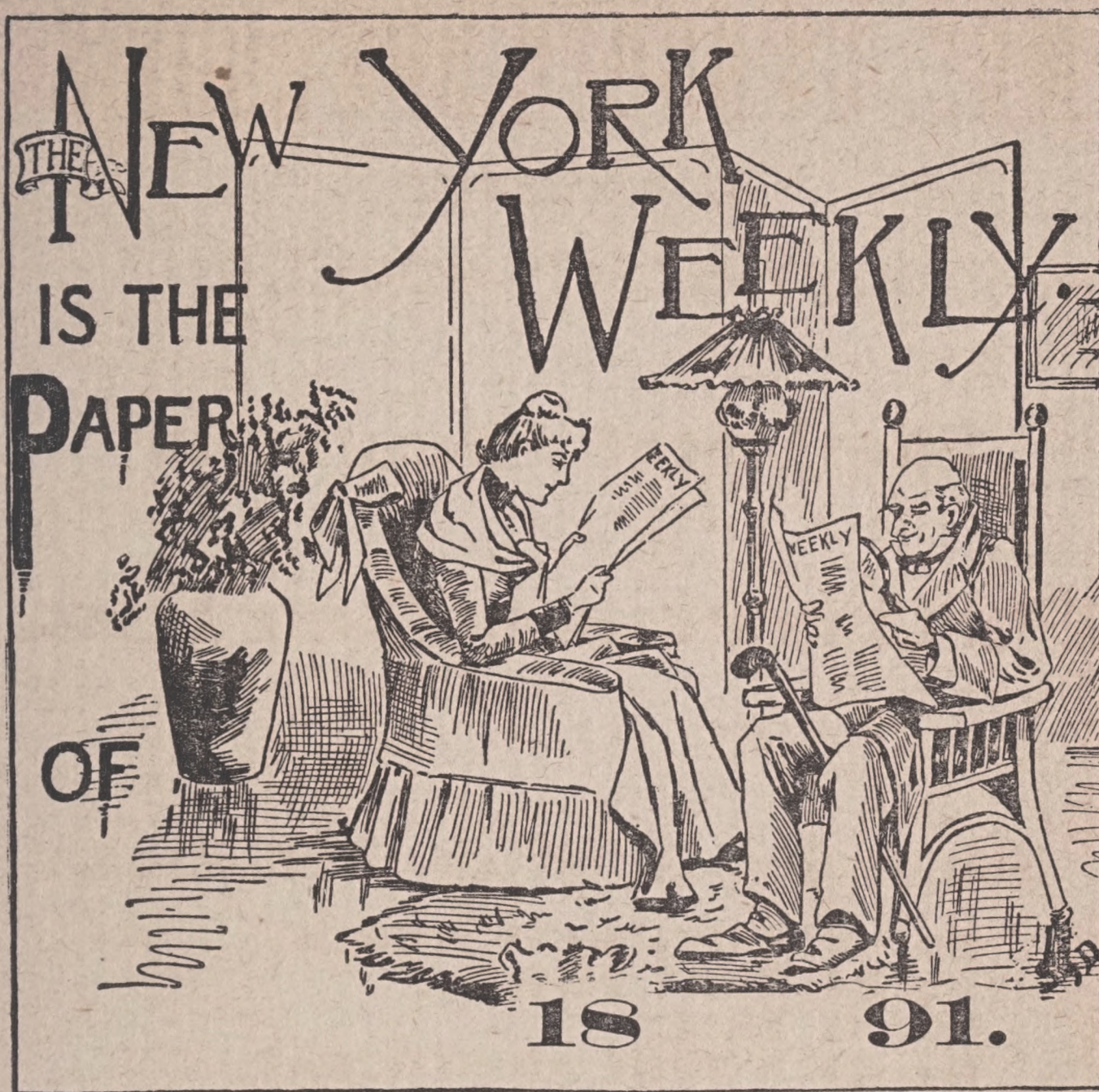
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